

ROSS DEMPSEY BLANCHARD

Chapter 1: December 1922 to 1927

I have a very strong belief that I was a gleam in my mother and fathers' eyes about Xmas 1922 or New Year 1923, for I arrived on the scene about 17:30 Western Standard Time on 28 September 1923 at Hay Street, West Perth, Western Australia. I have absolutely no personal recollections of this very important occasion. (Not sure where the name Ross came from, but second name, Dempsey, was the maiden name of my grandmother.) I was the second child, having an older sister, Margaret born in 1920, and a younger sister, Lesley born in 1928. My father had been appointed in 1919 to Ross Memorial Church, West Perth and in 1922 was elected moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Western Australia.

My mother used to tell me, some years later, that she had to be very careful to keep our front gate shut, otherwise I would get out and run like crazy down Hay Street with her in very hot pursuit. I have only two recollections of this period, and both of these were on board the steamship which took us to live in Wellington, New Zealand, in early 1927. The first of these was being a bit cheeky to one of the crew, and as a gesture to put me back in order, he grabbed me by the ankles and held me over the side of the ship. I was very excited at the sight of the white waves whistling past below, with absolutely no fear, but a little bit sad as my halfpenny fortune slipped out of one of my pockets and disappeared for ever. The other was when my sister, Margaret, and her girl friend enticed me into a game of chasing, and I had almost got `em, when one of them slammed the cabin door shut, and sadly for me, one of my fingers got jammed. It hurt like hell, but it was one of my very first lessons of pursuing members of the opposite sex!

Chapter 2: 1927- 1939

I believe we arrived in Wellington, New Zealand, early in 1927 and stayed at the Oriental Hotel on the south side of the harbour. My father had been appointed as the minister of Saint John's Presbyterian Church, where he stayed until late August 1939. I can only recall one incident in the early days, and once again this concerns a young lady. I introduced this sheila to some of my mother's chocolate coated pills, which were delicious provided you got rid of them just before the coating ran out, otherwise you'd get a bit crook. The lass failed to do this and paid the penalty. Our paths never crossed again! My mother took me and my sister, Margaret, for a holiday to one of the eastern harbour beaches, and it was here that my fear of dogs started, as I was chased by a large dog. and it took me a fairly long time to overcome this. About this time, work on the building of a new Presbyterian Manse was well under way, and on my first visit I was amazed that there was no visible connection between the ground floor and upstairs. This was very easily explained to me by my father.

My schooling started at Te Aro Primary, I think in 1928, with a fairly long walk each way, doing my best to avoid the dogs. I can remember very vividly two experiences at this school of learning, the first being watching the senior boys climbing a wall at the back of the school building, going from ground level up to a great height, then back to ground level. This wall was about one foot wide and was backed by a corrugated iron fence, and the senior boys made it look very easy. So I figured if they could do it, so could I. Ha! Ha! I got to the top OK, but then froze, with not a clue as to what to do. My situation created a great deal of interest amongst the other kids and one female teacher. I finished by jumping off and instead of landing on my toes, it was the flat of my feet that took the blow. It hurt. Apparently I turned very white in the face and the teacher asked me if I was all right, and being a very independent character I said "yes" and walked away. It took many, many years, to find out that this prang had caused a curvature of the spine which is with me for the rest of my days. (A recent x-ray has revealed a healed fracture in my hip, which I can only assume was the result of this incident.) Three or four treatments a year by a chiropractor of excellent quality keeps me in reasonable shape. A small aside here will be of interest - in 1980 I went to the International Veterans Games in Christchurch, and passed through Wellington on the way. I went and had a look at this wall that I had jumped off, and immediately came to the logical conclusion that I must have been round the bend to do what I did, as there would be no way in the world that I would do it again.

The second incident concerned a girl student, who was screaming her head off at me for walking in an out-of-bounds area. Because she was so insistent and so loud, I got pretty rattled and on looking around saw an old horseshoe lying on the ground, which made an excellent object to scare her off and make her shut up. I picked it up and threw it at her, with the intention of giving her the fright of her life. Unfortunately, my aim was first class with a bulls-eye score, and immediate silence. I was horrified and did not know what to do, so walked away. Later that day I was questioned by the headmistress and given a note to give to my parents when I got home. Being a bit of an idiot, I put this in a post box on my way home and never heard another word about this. As a youngster I had a couple of bad habits - a great ability to avoid telling the truth and an even worse habit of nicking things that were not mine. There was a fairly large pine tree forest to the south of our house built on a good slope with a wide space in the middle going downhill. This made an excellent tobogganing track and I enjoyed the wonderful pastime of sliding down this track at a great speed of knots - the fact that I nicked the sleds for this machine from the local cemetery never entered my mind as being naughty!

In 1930 I became a student at Scots College, Mirama, a southern suburb of Wellington. I was never really very happy at this school, for it was riddled with bullies and I seemed to be a number one target for these oafs, even though I won most of my weight for age bouts in the boxing ring. My best friend during these years was Barney Hope Gibbons, whose father was a very wealthy Ford motor car dealer. In 1936, my 13th birthday present was a BSA bicycle, very heavy, no gears, no handbrakes, but I thought it was marvelous and used to cycle to school five days a week irrespective of the weather, covering the five and a half miles in about forty-five minutes each way, depending on the wind. My first daily action was to look out of my bedroom window to see which way the breeze was going. Initially the route took my over Mount Victoria, so you can imagine my great pleasure when a tunnel was opened through this hill. This double daily cycle five times a week very soon taught me to appreciate the term "wet, windy Wellington". In 1939 I was a member of the third fifteen rugby football team which was the first and up to that time the only team to win all its matches in one season. I played only about half of these games due to some form of injury. I won the intermediate boxing championship in 1939, and was presented with the only trophy I ever gained in this one and two thirds years at Scots College. My second term holiday in August 1939 was spent at Tongariro National Park, skiing with my other school mates and having a great time. World War II started on 3rd September 1939 and it was a wonderful adventure for me to travel solo from this holiday venue to Auckland by train, stay with some family friends, then sailed to Sydney, Australia, and get back to my home country. The trip to Sydney was under blackout conditions - my very early introduction to some of the nasty wartime conditions. Our family reunion in Sydney was marvelous for we stayed with my father's brother, my uncle Louis, who was also a Presbyterian minister. We went by sea to Adelaide, South Australia, via Melbourne, Victoria, arriving on 27th September, the day the Poles surrendered in Europe, and my father's birthday. I was 16 years of age the next day. I restarted my schooling early in October at Scotch College, Torrens Park, catching the train from the city with lots of other pupils. Very soon after my arrival at this school I was cornered by many other boys in the quadrangle and put under a bit of a tough going questionnaire, with the askers getting closer and closer with each question. It became very clear that they were going to check me out, so just before any physical contact, I very quietly said that I had just won the intermediate boxing championship at my last school. The effect was immediate, with several backward steps all round, and obvious facial looks which said 'we think we'd better respect this bloke'. From that moment I never had any troubles at this college. 1939 finished with a holiday at Encounter Bay, about 60 miles south of Adelaide, with my mother and my younger sister Lesley. We enjoyed lots of walking and surfing at a fairly isolated beach which later on was put under warning for the very dangerous surfing conditions which over the years has claimed many lives.

Chapter 3: 1940 - 1945

I really enjoyed my two and one third years at Scotch College for I was only interested in the sporting activities which were Australian Rules football, swimming, athletics, boxing, cross country running and gymnastics. The football game was much faster than rugby and I played as a rover, which meant you roamed all over the field. I seemed to excel in most of these activities and finished up with many trophies, certificates and new records. The first of these

was the mile run, with the previous best having stood for about 20 years. I came within about one fifth of a second in winning the combined school sports games 880 years senior championship record in 1941. My only other record was quite unique in that I was the only boy who started in the intermediate class and finished in the same class when I left at the end of 1941!

The day the French capitulated in 1940, the headmaster, Mr Norman Gratton, gave us boys a very good statement at morning assembly by saying he did not know how or when, but he was convinced the British would win the war. This triggered my thoughts straight away, for being only a couple of months from my 17th birthday, it was quite obvious that I would be involved in one way or another. Now having been in the army cadet corps at both schools, I had no desire to continue in this field, and the thought of being at sea for up to nine months at a stretch without any female company was just not on! This left the air force and if I was going to volunteer then it would be for aircrew training with the RAAF. Later in 1940 I spoke to my parents about this and their comment was that they would sign the necessary papers once I had finished my year at college. You can imagine my excitement when I finally got 'THE PIECE OF PAPER' to authorize my volunteering for the RAAF. As I cycled out the front gate of our house at Brougham Place, North Adelaide, a man walking on the lawn of the gardens right in front of our house, yelled out in a very loud voice "the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbour". I gave him a wave to acknowledge his message, wondering where on earth Pearl Harbour was, and came to the conclusion that with a name like that it must be American, and possibly in the Aleutian Islands. Correct on number one, but wrong on number two. I handed my application to the RAAF Officer at the RAAF recruiting office, North Terrace, Adelaide, and made an apology that I could not come in this week or next week as my parents insisted I complete my year at school. He gave quite a chuckle, put one arm around my shoulder and said "don't worry son, we are inundated with applicants, you won't be called up for six to seven months". He was right, for the very important date was 18th July

1942. After reaching the age of 18 and having left school, I was called up for a medical test to go into THE ARMY. This was the compulsory service and was known as 'the chocolate soldiers' - definitely not on a voluntary basis. I fronted up to this mob, did my medical, passed, and was then told that I would be called in about one week. The chap doing this was a fairly arrogant little corporal, who thought he was JC, but you should have seen his face when I told him I had volunteered my services to the RAAF, and there was no way I was going into the army. I never heard another word about this.

An important thing occurred in early 1940 when I was doing my swimming training in the school pool. I found it very aggravating that a small red haired lad was shouting and yelling in a very loud tone in the middle of the pool and getting in everyone's way. With a bit of low animal cunning and some good judgement, suddenly he found his head right under my right hand, down he went, the silence was golden for about ten seconds, but then the blood nut surfaced. My vocabulary of the English language increased by about 100%. Strangely enough after this event we became very good friends from then until today. His favourite description of me was 'Blanchard the boy with the musical bum' but this went right out of vogue. Another very good mate was Paul Kennett. We would meet up at Angus's house and cycle to school, smoking our heads off. Paul always had to get off his bike about every two hundred yards to pump up his tyres. They were great days. Angus and I joined the RAAF together but Paul who was a year younger than us had to go into the navy. I went to a concert at school in July 1940 and it was here that I was introduced to jazz music. After the final curtain, Angus, Paul and I got on the stage and jitterbugged furiously to two 10 inch 78 rpm records 'Sweet you, just you' by Joe Daniels and His Hot Shots in Drumnasticks and 'Dusk in Upper San Dusky' by the Ray McKinlay orchestra. I was hooked!! In fact I was so hooked that I took up drumming lessons with the late Mr Dick Smith who was the tympanist with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. This stood me in very good stead, which will come to light a little later. My Xmas holiday in 1941-1942 was to go camping at Port Noarlunga with about six other lads, ogling the lovely young ladies and generally having a great time. When I came back to the so-called civilized world, I got a job with Woodroofes soft drink makers. I lasted a month, then got a job as a taxi driver with Yellow Cabs. This lasted three months and I learnt more about the human race in this time than all my previous years. It was a magnificent occupation. I had a bit of a stoush with one of the administrators and then left and took up a job as a mechanic with Silver Taxis which was also very educational. When I

went down to Mount Breckan, Victor Harbour, to start my air force training, along with about 250 other recruits (including Angus Tyson) on Course 30 at No. 4 Initial Training School, my drumming abilities surfaced and I became a member of the air force dance band. This was great because it got me out of all sorts of other military bits of nonsense and it also helped me in another very important way: after six weeks of the three months course, I had to front up to the Category Selection Board, who would decide what my future training would be - pilot, navigator, bomb aimer, wireless operator, air gunner or a rear gunner. Like most of the members of this course I really only wanted to become a pilot, so you can imagine my sheer delight when the leader of the band took me aside about a week before this interview and said "Blanchard, don't worry about the meeting next week, all members of the band get what they want". You bloody beauty, I was going to be given a chance to become a pilot!

I did my elementary flying training on Tiger Moths at No 11 Elementary Flying Training School, Benalla, Victoria, passed with an average assessment, but no drumming. I then went to No 7 Service Training School at Deniliquin, New South Wales, did my work on Wirraways, once again passed with an average assessment, won my pilot's wings, was promoted to the grand rank of sergeant, and still no drumming. In May 1943 I was posted to No 4 Embarkation Depot at Scotch College, Torrens Park, South Australia where I met up again with Angus Tyson and we were then posted to No 2 Embarkation Depot, Bradfield Park, Sydney, New South Wales. We were only there for six days and the last night of our stay was very interesting. The WAAAF's put on a dinner dance for all these bold blokes who were about to head off to the much closer and dangerous areas of WW2. I had a dance with a very attractive WAAAF corporal this evening and during the dance I asked her what her function was in the air force. She told me she was a radar operator. Now in 1943 radar in Australia was a very mystic subject and her comment made me very interested so I asked her to tell me a bit more about it. She went on to tell me about her tracking an aircraft in south western New South Wales one night in April, but finally losing contact. It took me a tremendous amount of self control not to burst out laughing for I then told her that in all probability that was me. On 4th April 1943 I had to do a solo night flying exercise from Deniliquin to Echuca on the River Murray, a distance of about 45 statute miles, and then return to base. It was a beautiful night, millions of stars, no moon, no turbulence, with a satisfactory arrival at my destination - and me, a very cocky pilot at the controls. In fact I was so cocky, I did some aerobatics, then headed for home and a well-earned sleep. After about twenty minutes I could not see any sign of Deniliquin so came to the conclusion that I must have a head wind and flew on for another five minutes. Still no base. I then went into the square search pattern, five minutes east, five minutes south, ten minutes west, ten minutes north, and so on, expanding the pattern until I saw the lights of Deniliquin. Aha - I've made it! Unfortunately as I got closer I realized it wasn't base at all, and I had no idea of where I was, but at least I was in Australian territory. At this stage my fuel was starting to get a bit low, so I had to make a decision - bail out or make a forced landing. I decided on the latter and in a Wirraway aircraft, a forced landing at night had to be done with the undercarriage retracted, for if you didn't and survived, you were scrubbed for being extremely stupid. I went into the pattern, climbed to 4000 feet, dropped flare No 1, descended to 1000 feet and fired flare no 2. The first flare by this time had started a fire which generated a lot of smoke. As I turned onto my final approach and put on the landing light, it was though I was flying into a London pea-souper. As I was about to switch off the light, I saw a huge gum tree flash past my left wingtip, so I knew I was pretty close to the ground. I turned off the light and went into the pre-landing drill for an emergency, landing on instruments. When the altimeter read zero, I shut down the engine, eased back on the stick and did a very, very smooth belly landing. About fifty yards after this gentle touchdown I ran into a wire fence which brought me to a sudden stop. Because the gear was retracted, the undercarriage warning horn was blaring loudly, so I got out of the cockpit, opened the small cover on the right hand side of the fuselage, shut off the master switch and all was beautiful peace and quiet for a few minutes. The aircraft was pretty badly damaged, but the only injury I sustained was when I pulled my handout from the horn casing I scratched one finger on the hinge spring. There was quite an audience for this time of the day and they were *very* solicitous. I found out that I had landed at White Cliffs, Bendigo, Victoria, about ninety six miles from where I should have been. There was a very large army tank training unit there and one of their sergeants took me in hand, looked after me very well for about three days while the air force people came and dismantled the bird, packed it on the back of a huge truck, along with the pilot, and then drove to Deniliquin. On return to base I was

interviewed by the Commanding Officer, Group Captain J. Waters, and had my log book endorsed 'Forced Landing, inexperience, faulty night navigation'. It never came out that I had neglected to lower the gear on resetting course for Deniliquin and that this lapse could put the magnetic compass out of accuracy by up to sixty degrees or more. The gorgeous WAAAF Corporal thought this was a remarkable story and that I was a very lucky lad to have survived and we both chuckled over this for some time.

It was now that WW2 started to get much closer for us as Angus and I boarded the USA troopship Mount Vernon in Sydney Harbour and set sail about mid-afternoon. Just after we had set sail, a lot of the troops on deck watched the sightseers alongside Sydney Harbour Bridge waving us farewell until there was a sudden downpour. This caused a tremendous cheer from us for one of the onlookers on shore picked up her skirt and raced for the protection of the bridge! Our voyage was to San Francisco via Auckland, New Zealand, where we were given about twelve hours shore leave. Our first view of the US of A was about five or six days later with the beautiful Golden Gate Bridge shining in the sun. Our trip was very mediocre as the Americans treated us as though we had been conscripted. The comparison between their aircrew and ours was that all American pilots became officers, and as we were not officers, we were rubbish. There was a very difficult mooring problem at San Francisco due to a strong wind, but the skipper eventually made it. We were not permitted to leave the ship this afternoon or evening and next morning we had to scale down a rope mesh with our gear and board two or three barges which when loaded took us across the bay to Oakland and then entrained all six hundred of us rookie aircrew for our trip across the USA. The carriages were very comfortable and our attendant, an American negro, was a very nice chap who treated us *very* well indeed. One of my pastimes was to measure the speed of the train by timing the mile posts as they went by. It was usually in excess of 100 mph. One of my memories of this trip was stopping at some station where there was a US air force base with lots of rookies looking at us winged aircrew blokes with a fair degree of envy. Another memory was the train pulling into a siding to allow a passenger train to go through. It was a great sight to see this streamlined diesel driven monster go through. I counted at least 100 coaches it was gigantic. We stopped at Chicago at about two o'clock in the morning, got off for a bit of a stroll and saw nothing by railway tracks, coaches and freight wagons. But then out of the blue came a negro with a tray strapped around his shoulders packed with goodies of all sorts and of course we had to spend some money. My view of New York as we went through, was of an underground station about five floors below sea level a pretty miserable scene. My stopping point was Camp Miles Standish, about half way between New York and Boston. It was an American army training camp and here I was introduced to the US juke box, a huge machine holding about fifty 10" and 12" records by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Jimmie Lunceford, plus many others - I loved it! I had the surname of some family relations who lived in New Haven, Connecticut, and I went to this city on three days leave to see if I could find them. I made contact with a service club here and also checked at the police station. While patiently waiting for some answers, I played snooker with a gentleman who was associated with the club where I was staying and he turned out to be the proprietor of the railway service. I thought I was a pretty good snooker player but I never won a game against this opponent. The day before I was due to return to base my relatives were located, and much to my surprise the husband was in the police force. The last day of this holiday was great, spent on the beach with lots of talk about our relatives. As I was approaching the front gate of Camp Miles Standish at the end of my three days leave, a large batch of Aussies was coming the other way. As soon as they saw me, one of them said "we are shipping out in three days, so it might be a good idea for you to do a 180 degree turn and go back to where you have been".

I did not require any further advice and off I went for another three glorious days. At the end of this time, on my next approach to base camp, I heard that we were entraining in one hour's time. I hastily packed my gear and was not late for this parade, but the Australian Officer in charge was very angry with us for out of the six hundred odd in our contingent, about 99% had gone A.W.L. and on our arrival at our final destination we would all be charged. Now we figured that our destination would probably be the UK and if so, then the Brits would be far too busy to worry about charging us delinquents. We were right we never heard another word!

The train took us to New York, onto a ferry down the harbour, past the French liner 'Normandy' lying on its side by a wharf due to the huge amount of water sprayed to put out

the fire, then onto another wharf admiring 'THE BROWNOUT' at about 0100 hours which made peacetime Sydney look like Oonadatta at 0330 hours on a Sunday morning. We finally got off the ferry onto a wharf, lined up and numbers A1 to A10 ordered to turn right, quick march. I was No A10. We went up the ramp and down into the bowels of what turned out to be the liner 'Queen Elizabeth'. When my group arrived at our cabin we found it had nine bunks and one paliasse on the floor there are no prizes for guessing who won the paliasse! This did not bother me at all for I was very comfortable. When I surfaced next morning we were well and truly out to sea, and it took me about forty five minutes to find the 'other ranks' mess. There were two meals a day for, I believe, about 15,000 government sponsored passengers on this voyage. The American GI's were allocated a 6'x3' space in all corridors to be shared by three GI's. The first two nights at sea were spent listening to live jazz in one of the huge reception areas, by all sorts of muso's with top quality all round. After the second night the authorities banned this function as there were too many people in one spot at one time and if we had been torpedoed the loss of life would have been enormous. The Queen Elizabeth got along at about thirty two knots and used to change course about every ten to fifteen seconds to avoid the prevalent U-Boats that were haunting the North Atlantic ocean. About half way across the Atlantic Ocean we had quite an exciting experience. Suddenly the QE anti-aircraft batteries started firing - fortunately this was just a practice round. After about five days, the green hills of Scotland appeared on the horizon and although it was late June, the green was beautiful. We docked at Greenock, Scotland, and our group of about six hundred boarded a troop train and within 24 hours we detrained at Brighton, Sussex.

We were stationed at a holding post at the Metropole Hotel on the seafront. I was on the 6th floor and as the lifts were not in operation had to climb the stairs each time I returned to my room. Not long after our arrival in Brighton, my best mate Angus Tyson and I were walking along the seafront when we saw a sign which said "OUT OF BOUNDS TO ALL SERVICE PERSONNEL". Being true Aussies, we just looked at one another and without a word we went to investigate. We walked down a flight of steps and came into a fairly large room with a full-length bar, complete with barman, a nicely carpeted floor with about 40 to 50 tables with several comfortable chairs to each one, a small dance floor and a stage with a semi-grand piano and a full kit of drums, complete with sticks and brushes. Angus, who was a very good pianist in the Fats Waller style said to the barman "would you mind if we played a bit of music?" His response was "no, be my guest" and we had a ball. After playing for about an hour, the barman asked us if we would be interested in playing there six nights a week for ten shillings per night and all we could drink for free. Now there is no way in the world that anyone in their right frame of mind would say "no", and if my memory serves me correctly, then I think we started that very same night. The news got around very quickly and soon we had a five piece band, all under the same conditions. The joint was jumpin' and packed very night. My good mate Angus lasted two weeks but was then posted away to his advanced flying course. Another good pianist took his place and after about one month, a man came up to us during the interval and introduced himself as the manager of the Dome Dance Hall. He asked whether on our free night we would be interested in relieving the big band for fifteen minutes every hour on the same conditions as we were already enjoying. Once again, how could anyone say "no". So here we were, doing something we all enjoyed and getting paid almost as much as the air force - if you take into account the free drinks, then I consider it would be quite a bit more. What's more it was all TAX FREE!

On 4th September I was posted to No 6 (Pilots) Advanced Flying Unit at Little Rissington in the Cotswolds and on 28th September 1943 I had my first lesson in advanced flying - I must say I could not have received a better 20th birthday present! This course lasted four months and was very advanced. Not very long after I started I figured out that if I wanted to give myself a sporting chance of surviving this tremendous piece of human nonsense (WW2), I must devote all my energies to flying. My drum sticks and brushes were put away and never used again professionally. There was one funny incident here and this was my sleeping-in one morning along with two other diggers. On arriving at the flight centre, we were hauled over the coals by Flight Lieutenant W McRobbie. He really went to town and apparently I couldn't help smiling. He went right off, and I had the largest strip torn off me to date. When I sent my Xmas cards for 1943, I sent one to Lord and Lady Bledisloe. Lord Bledisloe had been the Governor General of New Zealand and I had been to an afternoon tea dance at Government House, Wellington in 1939. I received a very nice card in response and because it was on

display, word got around that I had some excellent connections - and McRobbie treated me with kid gloves for the rest of my stay at Little Rissington! The first six and a half weeks were spent on day flying with type experience and cross country exercises, a lot of which was done with two Kiwi pilots, Flight Sergeant Madsen and Flying Officer Blackwell. I did a low level cross country with the latter and when I went down to the Aussie low level of 150 feet, he went right off his block and very brusquely said "TAKING OVER" and down we went to ground level. I am sure he did a bit of grass cutting with this display. It was most intriguing. The next twelve days were spent on the B.A.T. flight where for about an hour before flying one had to put on glasses with very dark blue lenses, and all cockpit windows were covered with dark yellow screens. This meant that all the pupil pilot could see were the luminous instruments. The pilot did everything from start up to shutdown, with of course direction guidance from the instructor. It was first class training, which totaled twenty hours flying. I am not sure but I think the BAT stood for beam air training? After another eighteen days day flying I went onto the night flying training. After 4 hours, 10 minutes, dual operation, I did 35 minutes with Kiwi F/S Madsen and he was so impressed with my standard that he apologized for not being able to give me an above average assessment. It looked as though Bendigo had taught me an excellent lesson. The night flying system in England made our Australian one look like it was still in the Bleriot days, for in Aussie all we had was six flares in a straight line, with one at the end to make up an L shape, and a ground operator to give you a green light if it was OK to go, or a red light to hold. The UK system was called the DREM - I don't know why other than it may have been named after its inventor, but it was magnificent, with a ring of white lights on a two mile radius of the aerodrome's centre, with lead in lights to the runway in use, with their lights only visible if you were flying into wind. There were also lead in lights from the perimeter lights to the runway in use, along with green and red lights at the end of the strip to indicate your correct level of approach. For me, this made night flying so much easier. Every airfield in the UK during WW2 had a red flashing beacon which spelt out two Morse code letters about every half minute and these were changed every 24 hours -their name was PUNDIT. In the UK there were four other beacons called OCCULTS which flashed a single Morse code letter about every minute, and from memory these were only changed monthly. There were quite a few other PUNDITS around the UK which were slotted into dangerous country to entrap the enemy - I can't remember what the trick was to make sure one didn't get caught with one's pants down! It is really quite remarkable, when I think about it now, 'air traffic control' was an unheard of term in those days, but the amount of traffic flying around the UK was enormous and you only had an inkling of operations, and of course absolutely no knowledge of the opposition, which I guess was more active on the eastern front than dear Old Blighty. I volunteered my services to become a glider pilot about this time, with the forlorn hope of being involved in the forthcoming invasion of Europe, but I was ignore and posted to No 1 Staff Pilots Training Unit at Cark in Cartmel. I was pretty brassed off with this for it turned out that the Avro Anson Mark 1 was the most basic aircraft that I had flown to date, apart from the dear old Tiger Moth, which was exceptional. Nothing much happened at Cark apart from a nasty mid-air collision with two Avro Ansons around the Mull of Galloway. One of the pilots was on our course and he had taken me under his wing for being so far away from home. It was very sad. There were several Polish pilots on this course. One of these was Sergeant Schlitzinger - no prizes for guessing what everybody, including the WAAF's, called him! He had an interesting experience one night on one of his early solo cross country flight. The weather was a bit nasty, but he successfully completed the trip although his landing was very rough and bumpy. He was most upset about this and even more upset when he learnt that he hadn't landed at Cark air base, but at the railway yards at Lancaster. He copped a tremendous amount of teasing but I am sure he did not really know the nature of this for he always had a grin on his face. A great co-incidence comes to mind for all my courses in Australia were No 30 and the course at Cark in Cartmel had the very same distinction. I finished at Cark on 7th March 1944 with another average assessment and was given a week's leave, after which I headed off to Millom in Cumberland. Now for me, and I am sure for all others in a similar boat, the world changed. I was no longer a pupil, I was a member of THE STAFF, and what a huge difference this made, plus the fact that I was now engaged in some positive activities. I was not at this station for very long, but it has many memories for me. I had a real problem with mail as all mail was sent to a unit in London and transferred from there. I was not getting any letters at all until suddenly I was deluged - all these letters had been sent to the wrong unit. Sadly one of these letters was from a good mate of mine who was serving in the Australian Navy, to tell me that a lass I was

rather keen on had been taken very ill with scarlet fever. I had just read this and was walking back to my quarters with my head down when I was pulled up for not saluting the Commanding Officer - these things happen. One of the WAAF's in the parachute section showed a rather nice attitude to me and we used to cycle down to the beach, along with a host of others, where we all enjoyed the sunshine and some of us the freezing cold water of the Irish sea! This lass's name was Mary Howard and she was a beauty. Another memory is of heading off one night with pretty nasty weather and getting nowhere with the trainee navigator's training, so I put the dear old bird into climb and somewhere between 12 and 15 thousand feet we broke clear of the rubbishing weather and there were all the stars and some planets with no moon and crystal clear air to set the trainee navigator's blood pumping. He had a ball. When we got back on the ground the staff wireless operator said that he had been listening to a commercial station in New York with excellent reception. When I told him what height we had been flying at, he nearly wet his pants. Our flying roster at Millom was two weeks day/two weeks night, and at anytime there was the slightest trace of cloud on Black Combe, (a local hill) day flying was cancelled. Of course at night time this was not apparent and we flew in all sorts of nasty weather. I can recall one night towards the end of the first flight, I was absolutely bushed and how I got the Aggie (Avro Anson) back on the ground in one piece puzzles me to this day. At the second briefing on this night, the operations officer asked if there were any pilots who would prefer to give it a miss - I was the only starter and was excused with good grace. I think I was in the cot by about 12:30 and did not surface until about 19:00 hours that day, which gave me about ten minutes to get down to the next briefing. It was the only occasion that I had to do this, so it got tucked away as experience. Another feature about WW2 night flying is that at briefing every pilot was given an altitude to fly at in the event of an air raid warning, and he had to circle the nearest PUNDIT at that level. Now these were only 200' apart, and of course every one had their hands together and prayed like crazy that every altimeter was set at the same barometric setting. Fortunately for me, I never had to take this precaution. Sometime while I was a Millom, I applied for a commission and went down to the Midlands for my interview, which was successful, and I became a Pilot Officer on 24th July 1944. About one week later I was posted back to Cark to become a Staff Pilot Instructor.

I was not very happy at Cark, but I did enjoy the company of another Aussie who was a straight instructor. He came from north of Brisbane, Queensland. I can't remember his name. So here I was sitting in the right hand seat of the aircraft keeping a close eye on the rookie pilots. I came to the conclusion at one stage that my name must have been left off the list for Duty Officer tasks, for I did not cop one until Xmas Day 1944. The penny dropped. I can remember two rather interesting things at Cark. The first was a flight at night with a trainee Squadron Leader who had joined the RAF in 1937 and had not done any night flying since his training days. It was the usual British night with lots of Saint Elmo's fire, and turbulence, and the deal old S/L went into a left hand steep turn. He froze in spite of my comments, so I had to take over from him. It took me all my concentration to get back to straight and level flying. When I was checking our position, I got the terrible feeling we were back into a left hand steep turn again, only to be horrified on checking that we were doing a savage steep turn again, but not left but RIGHT! WELL, WELL! Back to base. In February 1945 the night cross country was due north right up into Scotland, with a full moon, no cloud, and the ground covered with snow. It was magnificent. I attended an Air Sea Rescue course for two weeks at Blackpool and on return to base, I became the AFR Officer with regular courses. In April 1945 I did a month's course for Aircrew Officers School at Hereford.

Later that year I met up with a lass, Joyce Redfern, from Manchester, and we would scoot off for weekends to all sorts of places. Finally she came up with the news that she was expecting, so I did the so called right thing and she became Mrs B. (Strangely enough about a fortnight after this, she was no longer in this state, and although this was possibly a genuine mistake, I believed I had been conned.) Nevertheless later we had two great sons, Andrew born in 1958 and Julian born in 1961 and I now have six grandsons to carry on the Blanchard name.

had my last flight in the air force on 26th July 1945 and was posted to No 14 Aircrew Holding Unit at Millom, North Lancs. I was at Millom for about two and a half months, then I went to Brighton for three weeks, then across to Southampton on board HMS Aquitania for a very

pleasant cruise home to Adelaide, South Australia, via Freetown, Sierra Leone, Capetown, South Africa, Perth, Western Australia and Sydney, New South Wales. Nobody was allowed ashore at Freetown, but here I experienced one of the most beautiful sunsets of all time, with the sky being covered with high cirrus clouds with many variable colours as the sun slowly went down. I was given a pass to go ashore at Capetown and a good mate of mine, John Bails, who was a F/O Navigator, DFC, went with me. During our stay we met up with a mother and daughter who took us to their home for a meal and a great chat. We finished up staying the night (no-one sleeping in the wrong bed!) and headed off next morning for our transport. We thumbed a ride with a couple of lassies only to find that when we got to the wharf, the Aquitania was slowly heading out to sea. We were extremely lucky as there was an escort about to go out to this ship and we were given a free ride. We climbed up a rope ladder to the many cheers and catcalls of our fellow passengers. One of my tasks at Millom had been as assistant bar officer, which had given me access to all sorts of goodies which were of great consolation on the way home! I disembarked at Sydney and came home to Adelaide by troop train via Melbourne, arriving on 28th November 1945.

Chapter 4: 1946 - 1968

My family was very pleased to see me in one piece. There were many renewal gatherings with old school mates, and it was here that I learnt that out of our crowd of seven lads only one had not come back. His name was Bruce Davies. He was killed on a Lancaster training flight just before he was due to go on operational duties. Early in 1946 I met up with an acquaintance who had just got a post with Australian National Airways and he recommended that I apply. I did, was accepted, and due to start in April 1946. I got cracking on my 20 words per minute Morse code endorsement, my 2nd class navigator's theory, and figured I would be in a very strong position when I started. At the end of March I was told that the course had been deferred until May, and then sadly it was cancelled altogether. In March 1946 I had a talk with my Dad about a photographic exhibition that I had visited in London in late April-early May 1945. This covered the release of some of the German concentration camps. I spent about one hour at this display and it took all my willpower not to cry. It was horrific and I have only seen about 10% of those pictures in public again. I was quite appalled when my father said that the Germans must be forgiven, and our paths went on quite divergent ways after that (I did not see him again until just before he died in 1980).

I was interviewed by Mr J.B. Ryland, the Operations Manager for Trans-Australia Airlines in June/July 1946 and was engaged as a trainee First Officer commencing 9th September 1946 on No 3 course which lasted six weeks at Point Cook, Victoria. By this time I had my 20 w.p.m. Morse code endorsement and was doing my second class navigators studies by correspondence course. I was heading in the right direction. I completed the course OK then flew for a total of eleven months out of RAAF base Laverton, Victoria and then Essendon, Victoria. By this time I was a fully fledged F/O, had passed my second class navigation theory and was well and truly into the first class navigation studies, which interestingly contained astro navigation. In late October 1947 I was posted to Adelaide, South Australia, as a First Officer with Trans Australia Airlines and did my first flight on Saturday 1st November 1947. This was the inaugural flight to Darwin, via Mount Eba, Oodnadatta, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Daly Waters and Katherine. We had two pilot crew, one hostess, no VHF radio, no cockpit loudspeakers, very few navigation aids, with the F/O doing all the paper work, on and off landing of gear and *very* rarely being given an opportunity to handle the controls. The good average flight time was about 11.5 hours, with minimal stopover time at each port of call. By the time we got to Darwin we were pretty bushed, so a lovely hot shower, dinner, then the cot. TAA had a dispensation from the Department of Civil Aviation to exceed the eight hour flight limitation for pilots. From memory there were eight Captains and eight F/O's based in Adelaide to cover our three weekly flights to Darwin, and a daily flight to Melbourne and return. I was averaging 75-80 hours a month. I can remember two rather interesting events in these days, and on both occasions the skipper was Eric Kreig. After leaving Alice Springs and finishing our airborne lunch, cruising on to Tennant Creek, we both dozed off. I was suddenly aroused by an urgent request for our position report and was quite amazed that Eric was still asleep, so I complied and all was well. The second was a charter flight to Alice Springs to pick up 21 immigrants and return them to Adelaide but with no northbound passengers. After a couple of hours I retired to the little boys room and very shortly we hit a savage bout of turbulence. It rained in the loo and there was a tremendous

crash from the catering section - then things went back to normal. When I got to the cockpit Eric was laughing his head off, so I suspected that the turbulence had been self-inflicted!!

In October 1948 I successfully passed my 1st Class Navigation theory examinations, including the horrendous spherical trigonometry questions, where you have to have about ten formulae in your head. The only one I can remember today is the easiest where

$$\frac{a}{\sin A} = \frac{b}{\sin B} = \frac{c}{\sin C}$$

with all the others much longer along with brackets and many + and - signs. On 8th October 1948 I did my first navigational flight in a DC4 Skymaster with Capt Doug Fisher, who already had his navigational licence. The flight was Melbourne-Adelaide-Perth, 8 hours 55 minutes day flying and 30 minutes night flying, with the return route in VH-TAA, 2 hours 30 minutes day flying and 5 hours 55 minutes night flying. On this trip I was introduced to the bubble sextant, a device that you sighted a celestial body, sun, moon, planets, and about 28 major stars, keeping the body in the centre of the bubble for an automatic two minutes. At the finish, you noted the time, did the mathematics and plotted the line on the chart. With three star fixes, by the time you had completed the final one, done all the mathematics and plotted everything onto the map, the aircraft was about 30 minutes down the track. Soon after this initial flight I was introduced to the system whereby you did all the sums first by pre-calculation, and then did the three star shots to a rigid time schedule at four minute intervals (say 0000, 0004, 0008). After half a minute after the final shot you had the three star fix plotted on the map. Great stuff, and if you got a three star fix within about 7 nautical miles of where you actually were, you were considered a bit of a genius. When I think back on this, it is quite amazing, for today with a Global Positioning System locked onto three or more satellites out of 28 available at about 20,000 nautical miles above the earth, the GPS will give you your position within about 100 years immediately. How smart the human brain is in some things! I completed my navigational training on 20th April 1949 and got my Navigational Licence No. 112 that month. The DC4 was a bit of a funny bird, for it did not fly straight through the air, but had a very small left-to-right swing, along with a very slight up and down nose action. This was hard to see visually, but with the bubble of the sextant locked on to a celestial body, you had to chase it up and down with the control knob to keep it centered. Quite tricky!

There was a DC3 night flight from Darwin to Alice Springs via Katherine, Daly Waters, Tennant Creek in the wet season, with John Dawe as First Officer (who has recently passed on). The turbulence began almost immediately and it was so bad that I could only hand fly for about five minutes with the aircraft suddenly going up at about 4,000 feet per minute, indicated airspeed about 170 knots, gear down, flaps down, no power on, then bang, down at the same rate, about 90 knots, gear up, flaps up, full power and continuous savage turbulence. It was so bad that it gave you eyeball bounce, where the body was vibrating at a certain rate, but because the eyeballs were moveable their rate was different. It was incredible. John could also only manage about five minutes, but between us we made it. All the passengers and the Hostess were sick and it was a terrible night, but after Tennant Creek things eased quite dramatically. John Dawe would have to be one of the *very* best, and I think that if there had been another First Officer that night, I would not be here to tell the story. It is incredible that in my 56 years aviation experience that was the one and only occasion where I suffered eyeball bounce. One other point is that if it had been any other type of aircraft than a DC3, I doubt whether I would be here.

In July 1950 the RAAF had three De Havilland Mosquitoes based in Alice Springs doing a comprehensive photographic survey. Being in the Air Force Reserve, I was given 2 hours, 40 minutes in one of these beautiful birds - I had a ball! In August 1950 I began my command training with Captain Harry Locke, DSO, DFC, who had been on the dam busting raids during WW2. He was a great bloke, an exceptional pilot and he got me into cross wind take offs and landings with a speed up to 30 knots. I couldn't have been too bad for I am here to tell the story. At the beginning of September my training was taken over by Captain Tom Shaw and my morale plummeted by about 200% due to his comments. I was given my first command check by Captain John Hickey, and failed, given the second by the same captain and once again failed, but was successful on the third on 12th October 1951. I was posted back to

Adelaide, flying the same sort of roster, but now there was VAR (Visual Aural Range), DMS (Distance Measuring Equipment) at Parafield, Leigh Creek Oonadatta, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Daly Waters, Katherine and Darwin, along with VHF radio and loudspeakers, all of which made a huge difference. Going back a bit to the early days out of Adelaide, there was always a bit of sporting competition with one of the radio operators at Tennant Creek on the Morse Code key starting off at about 15 wpm, but by the time he got up to about 30 wpm I was bushed and would call him up on short wave with all sorts of pseudonyms for good fun. Some time in 1952 my roster was changed and I had about thirty-six hours stopover in Alice Springs. It was at this time that the John Flynn Memorial Church was being built there. When I was about 5 years old, I was got out of bed one night, slippers and dressing gown put on, taken downstairs and introduced to the Reverend John Flynn, who was my parent's guest at the Presbyterian Manse in Wellington, New Zealand. I very clearly remember him bending over to shake my hand and I looked up at this man and thought "he's a giant"! His number two man was the Reverend Fred McKay, who was in charge of the construction operation, and I had flown Fred a few times, so knew him fairly well. After I had had my first extended stopover at Alice Springs I thought it would be a good idea to offer my services as a builder's labourer, which I did, but Fred insisted that I be paid the standard wage even though I resisted somewhat. In order to make amends a little, I left most of this tax free income in the bar of the Alice Springs Hotel where I stayed. Every time I go back to Alice Springs, I have a look at this lovely building and it gives me a good feeling to know that I helped to build it. A few years later I flew my parents to Alice Springs for the official opening of the church. My mother was amused when her husband was asked "Are you Captain Blanchard's father?" when for most of my life, I had been asked "Are you Dr Blanchard's son?"!

One afternoon at Parafield Airport, Adelaide, I was waiting for the bird that I was to fly to Melbourne and back. When it arrived our Senior Port Captain, Capt Robbie Roberts got off and in the course of a conversation told me that the 8-hour dispensation did not exist. My major concern was "what happens if in the event that after 8 hours there is a serious incident, or even worse an accident, what will the authorities do?" This greatly concerned me and I told him that next time there is one of these flights, I will contact the Flight Director and request a verbal dispensation to exceed the 8 hours flight limitation and make a note of this on my flight plan and all will be well. The first time I did this, the Briefing Officer would not accept this until I told him to ring the Flight Director for confirmation. This he did and away we went. This was successful for the next few flights. On one occasion the Flight Director was unavailable so I went up to Alice Springs and via Oonadatta and Leigh Creek both ways and I honestly believed that all was well. Unfortunately when I got to Oonadatta on the way home I was told by an agent that I had to take an 8-hour rest period. The aircraft was grounded and I and the passengers were forced to wait 8-hours before resuming our flight. I was devastated. Apparently lines between Melbourne and Canberra were running hot trying to get approval for my request. Almost immediately I was sent to Coventry but I was not grounded. On one of my flights to Melbourne, the DC3 Captain told me he had been appointed to get rid of me. I wrote a very pointed report about what had been done, why I had done it and if I had known then what I now knew, I would have gone about this in an entirely different manner. I really think that if the Department had used their brains, they should have given approval for the flight to continue, then sort the matter out on the ground. I didn't get fired and some months later I was approached by a very senior Captain and told that there would be no action and would I like to have my report returned. I declined on the grounds that it was addressed to the Melbourne Senior Route Captain and it was now his property. I was released from gaol and never heard another word about it. In fact I think I was treated with about the same respect that I had received from F/L McRobbie after our little barney at Little Rissington in 1943.

On January 19/20 1953 I was the navigator on a TAA charter flight Melbourne to Christchurch, New Zealand, and return, 10 hours, 50 minutes day, 5 hours night, once again a great flight with a great view of Mount Cook on the way home. In November 1955 I did three weeks of grasshopper spraying in a DC3 at about 100 feet above the ground to get the correct vapourisation and lower if there was a breeze. I also did a few flights to the British Atomic base at Maralinga in 1955. In early July 1958 I started my Convair 240 training - a magnificent aircraft powered by two Pratt and Whitney R2800 engines, which growled. It is the only aircraft that I have flown in my 56 years that in my final test, I had to do asymmetric

flying on take off at all up weight. An incredible bird - 40 passengers, 2 hostesses, 2 pilots, pressurized and air-conditioned. There were two very special CV 240 flights - the first being under endorsement flight with Mike Fitzgerald, the Training Captain from Adelaide to Alice Springs and back, with limited fuel due to a full aircraft, so we went into long range cruise and there was no problem in making Adelaide non-stop. The other special was to fly empty to Woomera, pick up another full load then return to RAAF base Edinburgh. After overflying Port August north bound we went down to dot feet for a bit of low flying practice, quite illegal of course, but quite exciting, particularly when we came upon a large bunch of kangaroos which fled rather rapidly except the boss, who was a giant and stood his ground ready to do battle. I flew this type of aircraft out of Adelaide for twelve months, then was endorsed on Fokker Friendships, my first turbine powered experience, an upper wing aircraft which hangs in the air rather than low wing types that sit in the air. My endorsement was done out of Brisbane, going to all the important secondary airfields in Queensland and my instructor was Captain Les Lee. Once I had finished my endorsement, I went back to Adelaide where I flew for the rest of my time with TAA. I had done several charter flights to Baucau, East Timor in DC3's and of course the flights came on a regular basis, once a fortnight, and at some stage the strip was upgraded to 10,000 feet reinforced concrete, but still no navigational aids.

In October 1959 I was the navigator from Amsterdam to Melbourne in TAA's first Mark II Fokker Friendship, a great flight via Rome, Athens, Beirut, Bahrain, Karachi, New Delhi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Saigon, Labuan, Zamboanga, Davao, Sorong, Darwin and Alice Springs. The latter was the longest leg. I was given the honour of being the skipper from Darwin to Alice Springs. It was an incredible bird, much more powerful than its predecessor and quite a bit faster. Our flight from New Delhi to Calcutta left just after a Qantas DC6B flight, and shortly after our arrival the crew of the latter came over to have a look as they were most impressed that we had arrived before them. The scenery on this leg was magnificent, no cloud and a clear view of the Himalayas - wonderful! The aviation activity at Saigon was immense with the French Air Force being in command and very busy with their war in Vietnam. The Captain on this delivery flight was Neil McKeough. I was upgraded to a Check and Training Captain on Friendships and did all the Adelaide based pilots renewal checks and quite a few with interstate pilots. In October/November 1960 I did some endorsement flying with two Air New Zealand pilots, Captain Pettet and Captain Schrader, and after some hours with the latter, we found out that we had both been to Scots College, Wellington, New Zealand, at the same time, but he was senior to me.

I was now upgraded to Assistant Senior Port Captain to Captain Eric Krieg. In early 1965 I did my Douglas DC6B endorsement. The DC6B was a bit of a lumbering giant - one memorable flight was from Perth to Sydney non-stop 7 hours 40 minutes with height restrictions all the way to over Adelaide because of aircraft all up weight pretty tedious. I flew DC6B's until August 1966 and I must admit I was not very impressed with this aircraft's performance. In September 1966 I went back to Fokkers and there was an interesting charter flight with some VIP United States citizens of the agricultural world. This flight was from Sydney to Portland to Mount Gambier to Horsham to Adelaide: Adelaide to Port Lincoln to Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie to Esperance (aerial inspection). I had a swim in the Great Southern Ocean at Esperance and it was cold!! So cold that the dear old Brass Monkey `THOUGHT `ED LOST `EM! Esperance to Kalgoorlie to Port Hedland to Darwin: Darwin to Katherine to Darwin: Darwin to Mount Isa to Sydney. It was very impressive, and on the last leg I was presented with a gold fountain pen, which I lost only a couple of years ago out cycling. In 1967 I was the Adelaide based pilot's representative on a committee to update the seniority system. It was a very cut throat business and no really satisfactory answer was achieved. I had my last flight with TAA 25/27 September 1967 due to a medical problem which no doctors seemed to be able to remedy, and when my sick leave ran out, I retired on 7th January 1968 after 21 years and 4 months. My log book showed a total of 16,127 hours 35 minutes of which 15,209 45 minutes was with TAA which gave me an annual average rate of 713 hours.

Chapter 5: 1968 - 1973

set up a business partnership with Angus Tyson, his wife Molly and my wife and we built a group of seven shops in Blackwood, a suburb of Adelaide, the costs being shared with mine coming from my superannuation benefits. It went quite well for about one year, then my wife's shop packed up, our marriage broke up and I was out on a limb. During my years at

TAA I had built a home at Cherry Gardens and it was a great wrench to leave that and my sons. It was the time of a huge boom in the Australian stock market with a gold mining company called Poseidon Ltd being the trigger. I approached Mr Bob Pentelow, who was an old Scotch Collegian, to see if I could get a job. He was only too pleased to employ me as an extra pair of hands, but I must admit I was right out of my depth. It came to a head about 18 months later when I had my head chewed right off for some error I had made and this was not done privately and everyone in the business knew about it. Bob Pentelow was pretty upset about this and took me into his office and told me he had just purchased a property on The Coorong and would I be interested in going there to keep an eye on things. I couldn't say yes quick enough. So off I went. The property is called 'Safari Downs' and is about half way between Meningie and Kingston, south east of Adelaide. At this stage it was pretty basic, a large shed cum workshop with a light weight motor bike, one single room with a good wood stove which I used as the eatery, another small building with two bedrooms and shower/toilet. There was a good supply of rainwater and plenty of self-supplied tucker. My vehicle in those days was a light weight Volkswagon truck which I used to drive to Adelaide on a Friday once a fortnight, camp one night on a large block of land that I owned in the Adelaide Hills, down to Bob Pentelow's home, load up the wagon, then back to the farm on Saturday night. A pretty onerous 24 hours, but I loved it. Shortly after arriving, I bought a fuel-powered 240 volt generator which I set up in the workshop and hooked up the mansion with some cable that I had been given many years ago when the Alice Springs airport was being rewired. It was so good to have power again that I set up my stereo gear, along with a reel-to-reel tape recorder, lights, power - a great home from home. My principal activities were motor cycling around the property, checking stock, fencing, mending gates and other general tasks. A bit later a tractor arrived on the scene with several gadgets, including a post hole digger, a spray system for insecticides, and a lot of my time was spent on spraying Salvation Jane, a fairly noxious weed, which strangely produces first class honey. During this enforced rest from flying, I also took the opportunity to renew my athletics training and interests in jazz. I joined the Southern Jazz Club in 1972 and extended my fortnightly trips to Adelaide to include Thursday night so that I could go to the club and was able to attend the 27th Australian Jazz Convention which was held at Adelaide University in 1972.

On one of my sojourns up to Adelaide, I saw a light aircraft operating out of a property just north of Meningie, so I called in, made myself know, and got the good news that an aero club was being set up in Meningie and that one of the committee members was Dr Jim Richards, whom I contacted on my return to the farm to make known my aviation background. He was very interested in this and my reason for having to retire from the aviation world. He thought there was a good possibility that my medical problem could be fixed, and if so, he would set up an air charter business with me as the chief pilot. So I went into Meningie hospital and the good Doc got out his scissors and sewing kit, did the necessary snip here and snip there, stitched me up and about two days later I flew myself back to the farm with the other pilot going on to Mount Gambier. I suffered a fair bit of pain, and each step was about six inches, so my farming activities were very limited, but Bob Pentelow was very understanding. After about 5 months I was more or less back to normal and made a proposal to the boss that I would be interested in a partnership, which I knew he would not consider because of his two sons. So I retired with good feelings all round, left the farm with all my gear and got accommodation at McGrath Flat about 20 miles south, south east of Meningie. I became the goofa boy at the Meningie aerodrome, cleaning the strips of stones and any other garbage that cropped up. I did a bit of flying from Meningie on my private pilot's licence. One very memorable trip was to Darwin with Dr Jim who was learning to fly, and the Meningie Hospital Matron. Three days later I flew back to Darwin with four passengers to escort Chris Sperou, the Australian aerobatics champion of several years standing, flying his newly purchased Pitts Special back to Murray Bridge, South Australia. This flight took just over 14 hours so I was a bit bushed when I got back to Meningie, but was very excited to get a letter from the Department of Civil Aviation to advise that my medical had been accepted and I could now get back into the commercial arena. I went through the necessary formalities, got my commercial pilot's licence, and in November 1973 became the Chief Pilot for Meningie Air Services. It was great to get back into the saddle again. At Christmas 1973, Jim Richards was good enough to let me use one of his aircraft to fly some friends to Queanbeyan, a suburb of Canberra, to attend the 28th Australian Jazz Convention. It was great to be back in the saddle again, but as often as I flew and produced a fair amount of income, the Doc had

the bad habit of spending more than came in and after 18 months Meningie Air Services had to close down. Sadly Jim Richards die shortly afterwards - a charismatic man, but a great friend to me.

Chapter 6: 1974 - 1988

In 1974 I was offered a post with Williams General Aviation, but I declined with thanks, and made the sensible decision to set up my own business in the name of 'Blanchard Air Charter'. I have to confess that this was one of the very best decisions I have ever made. On 26 December 1974 I got an very urgent call to fly two VIP's to Darwin so that they could assess the ferocious damage caused by Cyclone Tracey, which had hit Darwin on Xmas Day. When we got to Katherine I had a lot of trouble convincing the authorities that I had two VIP's on board and it was extremely important for them to get to Darwin. I finally won, but I think permission was given rather reluctantly, for two days later when we left Darwin, I had to assure the RAAF officer that I would not return while the crisis was on, and that I had to track via Kunanurra and not Katherine. The scene on arrival in Darwin was memorable for about 95% of the city was flattened the really the only way to recognize that it was Darwin was by viewing the harbour. The fact that I was a retired WW2 air force pilot gained absolutely no respect from the RAAF.

In 1977 Angus Tyson and I decided to embark on a trip to the USA in the hope of catching up with some good jazz. We arrived in Los Angeles and visited Disneyland, then on to Anaheim. Angus went to San Diego to watch a horse race while I visited the Aerostar factory in Phoenix, Arizona,. I met up again with Angus in San Francisco where we went to a jazz concert featuring Wild Bill Davis and Bob Haggart. On he final night in San Francisco jazzman Jim Diamond showed us a bottle of vino Bob Barnard had given to him. During the evening the waitress asked what we would like to drink. Angus ordered a wine and I said I would have a short spell. Some time later a very puzzled waitress returned and said "I'm sorry sir, we do not seem to have a drink called a short spell"! Our final trip was to Vancouver where we spent four days taking in the great scenery.

My 14 years in the general aviation world were absolutely fantastic. I flew to many sorts of different places in about fifty different types aircraft (which I hired on demand), ranging from Cessna 172's for whale spotting in the Great Australian Bight leaving Adelaide to well west of Eucla on the south coast of Australia, with me in the right hand saddle west bound and vice versa homeward: runs to Darwin in a Lear jet, with one flight climbing to 50,000 feet from where just before sunrise the curvature of the earth could be seen: a series of freight runs from Adelaide to Melbourne and return four nights a week, with me sucking on my oxygen bottle at anything up to 28,000 feet in a Piper Navajo Chieftain. On these flights I calculated the wind component at each thousand foot level so that I could return to Adelaide at the very best level. There was one flight where I went over at 28,000 feet with 125 knots tailwind and came home at 14,000 feet with a 10 knot headwind, block time overall was four hours flat. On one of my many flights with public servants, one stands out above all others. During one of our evening meals the subject of engine failure came up, so I suggested that one the last leg of our last day, I would be quite happy to give them a demonstration, provided they discussed it amongst themselves and came up with 100% support of the idea, then I would be only too happy to oblige. They agreed, and at 9,500 feet between Coober Pedy and Adelaide I went through a verbal description of what was to be done and then feathered the number two engine on the twin-engine Aerostar. The indicated airspeed dropped from 180 knots to 120 knots and the dear old auto pilot kept us on an even keel and maintained altitude. After about half a minute, I unfeathered and we went back to normal flight. They were most impressed and I think allayed any previous doubts they had about flying safely.

I had a South Australia Government contract to fly a number of different groups of people to many different places several times a year. One of the highlights was a Crown Law Department flight to Ayers Rock as a base, with daily flights to several difference locations for court cases. I would stay with the aircraft while the lawyers and magistrates went about their business. I would go for a 40-60 minute run, plug in my portable radio into my home-made solar power unit and listen to all sorts of short wave radio reception, have my lunch, take a nap, and then head back to Ayers Rock with happy clients. One of my stopovers on these flights was at Ernabella, an aboriginal settlement. I used to join up with Barry Jeromsen, a

school master there, and go for a run out to the airport and back, about 16 kilometers. On one of these runs we saw an aborigine coming towards us sniffing a can of petrol. Barry asked me to give him an estimate of this chap's age, and I nominated about 40. I was most surprised when I was informed that he was one of Barry's students in his early teens. A very nasty business and to this day, one of this country's major problems. Barry set an excellent marathon time some years later of 02:49 and he was a great bloke to know and run with.

During this time, I had joined the Veterans Running Association and competed in a number of marathons. The first completed marathon was in 1978 in Whyalla, South Australia, time 04:27:41. The next was in Honolulu where I finished no. 1218 out of 6512 in a time of 03:35:35 - this was a grueling race in which I lost so much weight due to perspiration that I had to hold up my trunks at the finishing line! In 1980 I completed two marathons - West Lakes time 3:05:12 and Festival City 3:08:41. My interest in jazz had also taken me on several trips to Bob Barnard's Jazz Parties in Melbourne and to Fremantle in Western Australia for the 1979 Australian Jazz Convention. My accommodation was booked some 10 km from the venue and I had my bicycle with me. This was the only time I could have been picked up for being over the limit riding a bicycle!

Another adventure on a bike took me from Alice Springs to Darwin in July 1980. I flew up to Alice Springs with the old firm taking my bike, gear and tucker. I slept out in the open but found it very cold at night, so it became my habit to light a fire either side of my swag to keep warm. One evening I inadvertently the spinifex caught fire and the flames were sweeping across the plains. I hitched a lift into the nearest town to tell the local police what I had done - but no-one was concerned "don't worry, there's nothing out there for miles!" I had recently become a vegetarian, but one night in the Larrimah pub where I had gone for my usual glass of stout, I saw a sign "home-made meat pies" - I couldn't resist and had one, then two and finally a third! It took me 11 days to get to Darwin and I was pretty whacked when I arrived. I was featured in the local newspaper including a cartoon of me on my bike wearing a captain's hat and the words "With airfares as they are, *why* didn't I think of this before!"

The 35th Australian Jazz Convention was held in Forbes in December 1980 and I had the opportunity to travel to Forbes in a light aircraft part-owned by John Pickering, a trombone player, accompanying his son, Sam, who was learning to fly. During our stay in Forbes, I gave Sam a taste of aerobatics which he enjoyed. During this time I was in training for the World Veterans Games in Christchurch New Zealand in January 1981 where I ran 3:05:37 in the marathon. With a burst of confidence, I decided to enter the 1981 Sri Chinmoy Triathlon at West Lakes - 1.6m swim, 43.4 km cycle and 16 km run. The water was icy cold and it took me quite a few minutes to defrost enough to steer my bike (and my brain) in a straight line! That was my one and only triathlon - it was a killer! In 1983 I ran the Festival City, Adelaide, marathon in 3:03:35 and the Big M in Melbourne where I finished No 587 in a time of 03:03:31. My last marathon was the Sunday Mail Marathon in May 1984 when I achieved my personal best of 03:01:27 (so heartbreakingly close to the 3 hours) and was awarded the over 60 years "John Bannon" Veterans' Perpetual Shield.

One of my ambitions had always been to ride the rapids so in early January 1981 I went down to Hobart for a trip on the Franklin River. I joined a good team of both men and women and it was a fascinating trip, although very cold, and I was luckily only to have one ducking. In 1981 Jenny and I decided to get married planning to spend our honeymoon at that year's Jazz Party. The date was set for 29th July which became famous as the date chosen by Prince Charles to marry Diana but unfortunately the Jazz Party was cancelled! The week before we married we moved into our home at dear old Dawesley with its downstairs den providing us with 20°C comfort all year round.

We went to an air show at Murray Bridge in the early 1980's and I became friendly with Henry Schulz who owned a Long-Ezy homebuilt aircraft. This set me on the path to start construction on my own homebuilt - a Cozy which had the great advantage of having two adjacent seats instead of one behind the other in the Long-Ezy. In 1985 I visited the designer of the aircraft, Nat Puffer, in the USA and he flew over the Munich to meet Jenny and her Dad before going on to the UK. I built a large workshop and commenced

construction of the Cozy in 1985 but unfortunately this was never completed as in May 1988 I was struck by viral encephalitis, which did very nasty things to me.

Chapter 7: 1988 - 1998

On May 13 1988 Jenny was working at a convention at the Adelaide Convention Centre. I called in to see her on the way to going to sit an examination in Morse Code in connection with obtaining a radio operator's licence. Whilst talking to Jenny, I suddenly felt unbearably hot, and dashed outside. I sat the examination (and passed to my amazement) and then came home, feeling somewhat unwell. The next day I mowed the grass and felt fine again. Jenny came home on the Friday and found me in bed, completely disoriented and with a fever. She rushed me to a GP in Mt Barker, who had me admitted to Mt Barker Hospital where I was put in a room with the windows wide open to try to cool me down and lower the temperature. The following morning when Jenny came to see me, apparently I had a series of seizures which worried Jenny so much she retired to a waiting room and started to cry. Luckily a concerned nurse came to see what was upsetting her. The nurse immediately called for the doctor who was on duty. He examined me and arranged for me to be transferred to Flinders Medical Centre without delay. My memories of what happened then are vague - I'm told at one stage I had to be put into a strait jacket. I was discharged a few days later and immediately refused to take any further medication. This worried Jenny who again took me to the GP in Mt Barker. The GP was a young woman who listened to Jenny's concerns, then came over to me, looked me straight in the eye and said "You're pissed off, aren't you?" - "Too damn right" was my reply! Jenny shut down my air charter business and it took me about five years to get back to anything like normal. I did manage to fly again after about 15 months and most of this was done with Mr Graham Gunn, the MP for the largest electorate in South Australia and Australia as a whole. Usually I flew with Graham Gunn who had a restricted licence, but on one occasion I had to fly the aircraft back to Adelaide solo -Jenny tells me that when I rang to tell her, she could hear my grin from ear to ear!

In 1992 I flew with Qantas to the Oshkosh Air Show, where I met up with Nat Puffer, who had designed the Cozy aircraft I had been planning to build. This is a huge airshow with a large technical exhibition in addition to aircraft. I purchased my GPS (Global Positioning System) which proved very useful on the trips I completed up until the end of my flying career in 1998.

In October 1993 we went on my first "Swan Song" in a single engine Piper Lance. The owner very kindly agreed to remove the back four seats so that we could stow all our gear including two bicycles. The route was Parafield, South Australia, to Benalla Victoria, where I had done my elementary flying training on Tiger Moths in the RAAF in 1942. Some of the original huts were still standing. Then on to Deniliquin New South Wales where I had done my Service flying training on Wirraways in 1943. From here we went to Cowra NSW where we met up with one of my TAA colleagues, Gordon Thurn, and his wife Ann. One of the highlights of the trip was to get an RAAF clearance to land at their base at Richmond NSW so that we could visit Fred and Meg McKay (the man who insisted on paying me for my builders labouring on the John Flynn Memorial Church in Alice Springs so many years before). We were welcomed at the air base, given a conducted tour including the tower, and had our photographs taken by the base photographer. We then flew coastal to Tyagarah, a private strip about 10 nautical miles west of Byron Bay, where we met up with Enid Whyte, whose late husband, Ray, was the very best pilot I had ever flown with.. We met Ian and Angie Hillier Ian had been a flying instructor at Murray Bridge - and they took us to see their home set on a remote property near Lismore. They had built their house from natural resources on the property and had water from a constantly flowing spring which fed from the surrounding hills. The bathroom had a wonderful view of the countryside from an uncurtained window which could be enjoyed whilst sitting on the toilet! In Gunnedah, we met up with John and Jan Sumner. John was the skipper of the Jumbo in which I had flown back to Sydney from the Oshkosh Air Show in 1992. The next leg was to Innaminka, South Australia, where the original hospital run by the Australian Inland Mission, was being renovated. After an overnight stay, we flew to Cadney Park via an airborne view of the many strips I had used years ago in the Simpson Desert (Erabna, Beale Hill, Mokari and Sal Lake). I had the latitudes and longitudes of these places logged into my GPS and sure enough they all turned up on time. I think an emergency landing at any of these strips would have been survivable, but getting off again may have been a totally different matter. The strip at Cadney Park is gravel, 1300 meters long and very

wide. Cadney Park is a homestead on the Sturt highway and the previous night there had been a bit of a stoush with some criminals, but thankfully that was all over by the time we arrived. Our last stop was Arkaroola, a great tourist centre in the North Flinders Ranges. We enjoyed three days there including a visit to the Observatory run by Reg Sprigg. Jenny was mystified that the film in her camera had not run out and was horrified to discover that it had not in fact moved from the start, so all the photos she thought she had taken were lost. She had promised Fred McKay to send a photo of the renovations at Innaminka. She overheard that a family staying at Arkaroola were going on to Innaminka, so she asked whether they would be kind enough to take a photograph and send it to her they *very* kindly did so, and Fred was not disappointed. This was a great holiday with a combination of flying and cycling.

In April 1994 I was a rear seat passenger in a home-built Long Ezy, flown by the builder Henry Schultz, to Mangalore to attend the annual air show for homebuilts, WW2 types and many others. I had a 40-minute flight in an American Starship and a 30-minute flight in a Nat Puffer Cozy, the aircraft I had started to build in 1985, but abandoned due to my serious illness in 1988. I slept in a tent, and somehow managed to hurt my lower back, so by the time I arrived home after being cramped up in the back seat of the Long Ezy, I was unable to move! My usual chiropractor, Dr Maxwell Horton, was on leave, and despite visiting a number of chiropractors and physiotherapists, I could get no relief. A few days later, we departed on an overseas trip to the UK via Honolulu, Vancouver and Alaska. As soon as we took off, we were served drinks and after 14 years of complete abstinence, I had a Gin and Tonic to relieve my back pain - it worked, and I have been a G&T fan since that time!!

In June 1995 Jenny and I set off on Swan Song No. 2, same aircraft, same conditions, same gear. This time we went to Ceduna, SA via Port Augusta (over-flying) to Ayers Rock via Emu (over-flying) to Giles, a very important meteorological station in Central Australia, to Newman, a mining town in Western Australia, up to Broome on the north-west tip of Australia. We had three days there for Jenny to have a good look at the convention facilities, as she was organizing a meeting there the following year. From Broome, it was coastal all the way home via Port Headland, Carnarvon, Geraldton - where we had a four day break with plenty of cycling - then down to Jandkot, the general aviation airfield at Perth. We enjoyed lots of scenic cycling here mostly along the banks of the Swan River, with beautiful sunshine and zephyr breezes. The flight home to Adelaide was via Albany, Esperance, Eucla - where we were lucky enough to see some mother whales and their young at the Head of the Bight and Port Lincoln. A total of 34 hours and 5 minutes flying - a great holiday.

On November 11th 1995 I was taken for two flights. The first was in a replica of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's Fokker and the second in a Wirraway - my first flight in this type of aircraft since the early 1950's. In December 1995 I was appointed as the check captain on a flight in James Morrison's (the world renowned jazz musician) Navajo Chieftain for an overnight stop at William Creek - a remote outpost 690 kms north of Adelaide. It turned out to be a momentous evening as they were having a Xmas party that night and of course James played a tremendous bracket on the trumpet with brother John playing drums on pots and pans! Some of the guests had traveled well over 100 kms just to keep the spirits flowing.

In September 1996 Jenny attended the convention in Broome, and of course I went along as the baggage boy. One day I hired a Cessna 172 and we flew coastal north of Broome, a little due east then back overland. The following day I was in a book store and saw 'Flight of Diamonds' by W.H. Tyler, which was a true story of a KLM pilot Captain Ivan Smirnoff, who had the onerous task of flying a Douglas DC3 from Bandung to Broome with 12 passengers and a small bag containing some very valuable diamonds, which he had been given just before departure in early 1942. They crash landed under Japanese attack about 100 kms north of Broome with several injuries, including the pilot. Most of the 12 survived, but the diamonds mysteriously disappeared. The interesting thing is that we flew right over this site, but did not see anything, although some of the wreckage is still there. It's a small world. On Boxing Day 1996 we hired the same dear old single engine bird and flew to Bathurst NSW and the annual Australian Jazz Convention, which has been convened every year since 1946. It was a great show.

I had my last legal fly on 8th February 1998 in James Morrison's Navajo Chieftain with brother John as the skipper. It is interesting to note that I flew four types of aircraft in the RAAF Tiger Moth, Wirraway, Airspeed Oxford and Avro Anson: four types of aircraft in TAA DC3, Convair 240, Fokker Friendship and Douglas DC6B: four types of aircraft in my navigational activities - Douglas DC4, Fokker Friendship, Lockheed Electra and Boeing 727: and finally about 50 different birds in general aviation. 1903-1998 is the summary of man's 95 years of heavier than air flight and it is interesting to note that I have been involved for nearly 56 of those years.

Chapter 8: 1998 - 2008

With my flying days over, I had to resort to other forms of transport none of which compared to the thrill of flying of course. In March 1999, we hired a houseboat called 'Paradise' at Kingston-on-Murray, and drifted slowly up the River Murray towards Loxton and Seven Mile Creek. I was the captain at the wheel, happily listening to jazz CD's, while Jenny lazed on the front deck with her binoculars watching the large variety of birds. A most relaxing pastime. In May 1999 we had our first trip to Generations in Jazz in Mount Gambier. I had met John Morrison in 1988 at a jazz function in the Southern Vales and as we were both pilots and drummers, we hit it off straightaway. John had told us about Generations, which is a combination of a competition for school bands and the James Morrison Scholarships. Generations was started in 1984 by a group of older jazz musicians to keep jazz alive in the district. It is now attended by about 80 school bands, totaling well over 1,000 young musicians. Since that time we had made an annual pilgrimage and never cease to be awed by the talent of the young jazz musicians. In October 1999 we joined "The Great Nullabor Cycle" - a group of 9 cyclists and Jenny driving a campervan as back-up. We started at Port Augusta and traveled via Iron Knob, Kimba, Wudinna, Streaky Bay, Ceduna then across the Nullabor Plains to Eucla and the Western Australian border. I managed to complete the whole trip - cycling 1058 kms. Again we were able to watch the whales at the Head of the Bight this time from viewing platforms on the beach.

In July 2000 we hire a campervan, large enough to take our bicycles, and headed for Katherine in the Northern Territory. A most interesting aspect of this trip was to visit the airstrips, which were on the route in my early TAA flying days, to follow some parts of the old highway, which I had ridden on during my Alice Springs-Darwin cycle in 1980 Tenant Creek, Daly Waters, Mataranka Springs, and to cover new ground, such as Kings Canyon and the Devil's Marbles (amazing rock formations which were spectacular at sunrise). After a trip by boat in Katherine Gorge, we turned left and headed for Kununurra in Western Australia. We had our only puncture on the road out of Timber Creek, but were fortunate that a couple from Tasmania stopped to give assistance. After a few days of comfort in a cabin at Kununurra, we moved out to Lake Argyle - a huge lake, three times the size of Sydney harbour. On a morning cruise on the lake we saw euros, archer fish (which spit into the air), cat fish, crocodiles and rock wallabies. We then headed for Darwin via Katherine, Litchfield - a serene national park with some magnificent waterfalls and Kakadu - where we enjoyed an early morning Yellow Waters cruise at Cooinda and saw a jabirou stork, broilgas, a sea eagle and salt water crocodile. Unfortunately the weather was unseasonably hot and humid as we arrived in Darwin, so we cut out journey short and took an early flight back to Adelaide. We covered approximately 6150 kms during which time I cycled 98 miles, averaging 15.19 mph.

In July 2007 we went on "Swan Song No. 3" - this time by road to Queensland's Gold Coast to visit my No. 2 son and family. On the way we met up with Gordon Thurn (ex TAA) in Orange where we woke to find the car covered by snow! We stopped at Gunnedah to catch up with John Sumner, who was looking forward to retirement from Qantas that year, morning tea with Enid Whyte at Oceans Shores, lunch in Byron Bay with Ian and Angie Hillier, still living in their self-built house in Lismore, then down the Pacific Highway to Gosford, where we left the car and caught the train to Sydney. We enjoyed lunch with John Morrison at Darling Harbour, went for a ride on the Manly ferry and had a tour of North Sydney with Professor Geoff Benness (an old friend from Jenny's medical school days). Our last stop on the way home was to visit my nephew, Colin Fox, and his wife Christine at Romsey in Victoria.

I started traveling in 1927 - 81 years ago I think it is now time to stop.