

A FIRESIDE CHAT

by Patrick Stephen Jocelyn O'Connell PRIMROSE.

Born 31 May 1900. Died November 1968.

Transcribed by his daughter Jocelyn.



Prim [second from right] with 3 Squadron RAAF pilots at Benina Libya, 1941.

Looking back on my life, I have really lived in a remarkable age.

Born in May 1900, I have lived through six reigns – Victoria, Edward the 7th, George the 5th, Edward the 8th, George the 6th and Elizabeth the 2nd.

I remember Hansom Cabs; women laced so tight they nearly split in two. - Smoking and drinking by women in public was almost unheard of. - I think we had better manners than the youngsters of today, but very few women worked in those days and, being looked on as the weaker sex (I often wonder who started this rumour), they expected to be pampered. Now women are calling for equality with the male, and largely getting it, lack of little courtesies shown to them is perhaps understandable.

Bush Characters

When I came out to Australia, in 1924, I went jackarooing on the 65,000 acre property called *Kings Plains* situated between Glen Innes and Inverell. The owner was a man called Dr Vivers, a really amazing man about 6'3", quite distinguished looking, an upturned moustache. He used a monocle on all possible occasions. He took about eight years to get his Medical Degree but fortunately he never practiced. His three large sheep stations saved his patients from this.

Kings Plains carried about 40,000 sheep, 8,000 head of cattle and quite a few hundred horses. It was the last of the big hand shearing sheds, with stands for 44 shearers. Four or five cooks turned up just before the start of shearing and the shearers had the right to vote for the one they wanted to employ. The shearers paid so much a week each for the cook and his offsider. The squatter paid the balance covering the station hands—these were rouseabouts, packers, tar-boys etc. The food was first class quality and there was stacks of it, but the shearers never failed after about three or four days of complaining bitterly about the rotten *kai* [food] they were getting. There were not many motor vehicles in those days and the shearers and shed hands arrived at the start of the season in sulkies and buggies. Being 24 miles from Glen Innes, the station store

was opened on Saturday selling cigarettes, pain killers etc. As the only Jackaroo on the place I acted as storekeeper.

Dr Vivers had three great hates – station managers, gardeners and Jackaroos. I established a record by staying the course for 21 months. Although I only got a pound a week, and my keep, and worked very very long hours, my days at *Kings Plains* were really very happy ones as I met some remarkable bush characters. Some Saturday mornings three of us used to cut enough firewood for the station to use. I looked after the fixed steam engine driving the circular saw and two bushmen Bob Allen and a hugh cove called Huey McAvoy cut the wood into stove sized lengths.

Bob Allen was known as the greatest liar in the New England district. I would have said the greatest liar in Australia. Mention the *Melbourne Cup* and he had a horse pipped at the post by dropping dead. He could lie his way or top any tall story that was told. One smoko Huey rocked me by asking Bob Allen if he'd ever given birth to a child. – Stumped at last – not on your life – Allen scratched his head, said *No No No No No* and then said with a grin – *But by heavens I knew a man who did!*

World War One

Exactly 50 years ago, sometime about the middle of March 1918, I gained my Pilot's wings. I passed out on twin engined Handley Page heavy bombers. After about 3 hours in command, all daylight flying, I also did a few circuits and bumps in BE2C's, night flying. I was then posted to Stonehenge. Checked out on *Maurice Farnham Shorthorns* and FE's, daylight flying, and FE's night flying and bombing. After a couple of hours night flying on Handley Pages I was posted to France, with 213 Squadron RAF attached to General Trenchard's Independent Air Force. To celebrate the gaining of my wings fifty years ago, Mum and I tomorrow will do our best to crack a bottle of red champagne to celebrate the event... (Well, this is tomorrow and we cracked the bottle of pink champagne. I was slightly amused when Mum giving me a toast said "*Many Happy returns of the day*" - Just imagine what a cranky old "B" I would be in 50 years time at the ripe old age of 117.)

Towards the end of the war in 1918 some bright spark at Headquarters had the bright idea of bombing Berlin. From memory the raid was to be carried out by about 40 Handley Pages. After bombing Berlin the aircraft, not having enough fuel to return to base, were to force-land in Denmark etc. - anywhere possible, except Germany.

All aircraft were to be in radio contact with one another during the operation. A South African opera singer came round the Handley Page Squadron and the French Independent Air Force and selected quite a few of us for the "show" [Berlin mission]. - Not and I repeat *not* for our flying ability. I never was a first-class pilot, having had three prangs of my own and one with somebody else. The selection was made for the clarity of our voices over the radio, which was rather primitive in those days. We were then sent back to an aerodrome - Salisbury Plains in England - for radio training, doing our flying in B2Cs. We acted as wireless operators, the aircraft being flown by local instructors. Just before the completion of the course the Armistice was declared... Much to the joy of everyone on the station! The reason for the wireless communication between the raiding aircraft was to ensure that we got to Berlin. We were of course led by qualified and very good navigators.

In normal raids we certainly did not depend on our navigators. I had a "beauty" - an empty-headed man called Barr, who joined the Air Force to get away from the trenches. On raids he never failed to ask "and where are we?" Fortunately we only flew on moonlit nights. Our navigational aids were on our side of the line – fixed lighthouses flashing various numbers of dots. The enemy had fixed positions, firing what we called "flaming onions". Each position having a different number of onions. Flaming onions were, balls of brilliantly coloured phosphorus [fired in a short "string" by a multi-barrelled cannon], the idea being that we would fly into them and set our aircraft on fire. We of course had no parachutes, as some armchair commando at the Air Ministry considered that a big proportion of air crew would bail out before getting into action, had parachutes been issued!

Recoilless Gun Fun

Handley Page bombers from memory cruising about 75 mph found it almost impossible to get out of the searchlight once they were beamed by them. Nobody in those days seemed to realise that guns on an aircraft could be fired without a recoiling system. For example, an 8 gun Hurricane being afloat in the air takes up the shock of the recoil when all 8 guns are fired. This merely reduces the speed of the aircraft to some extent. Anyway some boffin invented a gun to be used in putting out searchlights or scaring the daylight out of searchlight crews. The gun mounted in the cockpit from memory 7 to 9 ft long. The trigger being about the middle of the barrel and was fired resting over one's shoulder. To put a searchlight out one fired down into the beam of the searchlight. To counter the recoil damaging the aircraft, the gun fired a two pound shell from the front end and a two pound bag of buckshot from the rear end. Gunners in their excitement and being nearly blinded from the glare of the searchlight were inclined to fire the gun before it was sufficiently depressed and the charge of buckshot then narrowly missed the pilot or observer sitting directly behind him and tore a hole in the top of the plane. By the way, the gun that fires from both ends was called the [Davis Gun](#).

For some unaccountable reason, pilots had to do a spot of duty on these guns. The course was held at an RNAS station called Eastchurch. The gun was mounted on a tripod in a fast motorboat. With drinking parties in the mess nearly every night, most trainees had a hangover each morning. The seas were usually choppy and while I was there nobody ever hit the floating target.

Changing Pilots

An interesting if rather hair raising thing about learning to fly a Handley Page, having no dual control, the instructor and pupil changed seats in the air. This was done usually at about 2,000ft with the aircraft in a gentle glide. Before I did the changeover of seats and taking control of the aircraft for the first time I was sent up to see how this changeover was done. The instructor was a very, very excitable, short, bad tempered Welshman called Taffy Edwards, who flew with a cushion behind his back so that he could comfortably reach the rudder bar. The pupil was a 6'4" South African called Lofty Wilson. Taffy forgot to remove the cushion during the changeover and poor old Lofty was so cramped for space he just couldn't control the aircraft. With Taffy calling out, "*Fly the damn thing, fly the damn thing!*" and Lofty bellowing "*Remove the damned cushion!*" The few moments before everything was arranged satisfactorily was quite amusing and exciting.

I was very fortunate in my instructor, a gum-chewing very, very cool Canadian called Yates, and I had no trouble at all.

Prangs

Coming back to prangs, as stated earlier my first was in the Sopwith Camel. My second was when I went over on a bombing raid acting as nose gunner in a Handley Page. This was supposed to give me confidence when I went over as a pilot by myself. Our objective was an enemy aerodrome about 40 miles over the front line. Flak was very slight, but as we were bombing from about 2,000 feet, we were hit in the main petrol tank by small arms fire. The aircraft had a small capacity gravity petrol tank under the top wing. We always took off on the gravity tank and well and truly airborne switched onto the main tank. The pilot of the aircraft was our senior flight commander and he sent me back to a space between the pilot and observers seats and the bomb racks to use the emergency pump to get the petrol into the gravity tank from the main tank. It was a beautiful moonlight night and looking through the entrance door in the floor of the fuselage I had a very clear view. We eventually ran out of petrol. The skipper crash-landed us beautifully on the tops of trees in a small forest, just on our side of the lines. Nobody was hurt. It was a comfort. Flying a wooden aircraft, if the switches were turned off in time they wouldn't burn. Also our stalling speed was very low.

My third prang. A new 1,000 pound bomb had just come out – a long fearsome looking thing. Far too long to go into the permanent bomb racks so it was slung under the fuselage by special equipment. I took off on the raid to drop this monster onto a town called Metz, which is in Alsace-Lorraine. I had no trouble getting off, but when I did quite a gentle turn the aircraft got into a terrific sideslip. The bomb was quite secure fore and aft but tipped over when one went into a bank to turn. We used to take off down the flare path shaped like an L. The lights were electric light bulbs which could be switched on and off. The Handley was also

fitted with calcium flares under the bottom wing. These could be switched on by pressing a trip, but nobody ever used them due to the danger of setting the plane on fire, in case the undercarriage collapsed. Having made a couple of very wide circuits of the aerodrome without gaining any appreciable height, I fired off distress rockets so that the landing lights could be switched on. Nothing happened. No lights came on, as another aircraft flying high was taken to be an enemy one.

I decided to land and did so. Quite one of the best night landings I have ever done, but unfortunately I was about 45 degrees off true course and well overshoot. Having no brakes I finished up through a canvas hanger holding two Handley Pages. My aircraft was hardly damaged but the other two aircraft were severely damaged. No great fuss was made of the prang, or the loss of the two Handleys, but all hell broke loose when the clock from my aircraft was found to be missing. My observer and I were looked on with grave suspicion - as if we had deliberately pranged the aircraft to steal the clock!

Fallacies:

"A rolling stone gathers no moss." What complete and utter drivel. Take me - I gathered Mum, two daughters, two sons in law and two grandchildren. I approve of the whole gathering, but whether the whole gathering approves of me is another matter!

Rationing

This is rather rude but I just feel that I must tell it. Wartime, in London, the First War. Severe rationing in operation and the minister in charge was a man called Lord Rhonda. Place was the Colosseum Theatre in London. Probably the greatest variety theatre of all time. The scene an opium den in the east end guarded by an old Chinese storekeeper - the theatre every seat packed. Amongst the audience my dear old aunt and I. George Roby, probably the most celebrated comedian in London at the time, trying without success to get into conversation with the Chinese storekeeper. George Roby whispered for a few moments into the Chinaman's ear and then in a loud voice says "Well thank god there's one thing Lord Rhonda can't ration". The whole theatre rocked with gales of laughter. My dear old aunt her false teeth clacking was literally shaking. The laughter finally died down Roby turned to the Chinaman who hadn't even smiled and said *"You dirty old man - you knew it all the time"*. I turned to my aunt and said *"And so did you!"* - and she did, for tears of mirth were dropping out of her eyes.

The Poem - *There was a young couple of fashion,
Who had a tremendous passion,
When they got into bed,
He turned round and said.
Thank God there's one thing Lord Rhonda can't ration.*

POSH Travel

On the Steamer going out to Malaysia in 1919, we had a passenger called Mrs Symes. She was the wife of Mr Symes of *Symes and Darby*, an extremely wealthy firm in Malaya and Singapore - then called the *Straits Settlements*. Mrs Symes was an aggressive type of female, a terrific bore, and proud to the nth degree. All she could talk about was the wonderful *Rolls Royce* they used, you know, just for getting around. - Same as you and I using bike or leg locomotion, getting from here to there. By the third day out from Liverpool we passengers had "had" her and avoided her like the plague. She eventually attached herself onto the *Chief Engineer*, a big fat Scotsman, who being a ship's officer, couldn't very well be rude to her.

A few weeks later we arrived at Port Swettenham [Penang], Mrs Symes' port of disembarkation. On arrival we tied-up alongside the one and only old creaking wharf. Rushing down the wharf came Mr Symes, driving an old rattling T-Model Ford. As was usual, those passengers not disembarking lined the ship rail, to watch the passengers disembark and say goodbye to them. Mrs Symes, red as a beetroot and without saying goodbye to anyone, including the *Chief Engineer*, was hurrying down the gangway when the *Chief Engineer* leaned over the rail and in a loud voice, with a broad Scots accent said, *"Well, Mrs Symes goodbye. Goodbye Mrs Symes, I see your husband has a Rolls-a-Royce, "and after a long pause, "and painted, by Christ!"*

I think Mr Symes got it in the neck when they got away from the ship.

Early Aviation

Coming back to flying in the early days, the French had an extraordinary aircraft called the *Caudron*. Some RNAS pilots were trained on these at an aerodrome called Le Bourget a few miles outside Paris. I never saw any of these aircraft so any remarks I make are purely from what I heard from pilots who had actually flown these aircraft. - The wings had no ailerons, banking was brought about by the trailing edges of the wings being bent by the movement of the joystick [[“wing warping”](#)]. I was told that quite a lot of pressure had to be applied. Apart from this the aircraft was quite nice to fly.

Career

I'll probably bore you but I'll give you a brief résumé of what I did after running away to sea in 1914. In July 1917 I joined the RNAS and became an original member of the RAF, when the RNAS and RFC were amalgamated and became the RAF on the 1st April 1918. I left the Air Force in April 1919, and left for Malaya about September the same year, to become a rubber planter with Dunlop plantations. After nearly four years in what I consider to be grandest country I have worked in, I sailed for London in 1924 on leave. Unfortunately, severe bouts of malaria forced me to resign from Dunlops whilst I was in London. I then got a job as a clerk with a grain firm called *Louis Dreyfus and Company*, the biggest wheat and grain firm in the world. I was supposed to be trained for a job with the firm in South America, but when I found the firm really intended sending me to India, decided to leave them, directly I could find another job.

Job Hunting

On my way to work one morning I saw an advertisement in the *Morning Post* issued by the Tanganyikan Government (i.e. the former German colony of German East Africa) calling for applications for some Government job, one of the duties being to attend hangings. The salary was about 700 pounds - a fantastic sum in those days. “Ah,” thought I, “*The job is just for me.*” Not too many people, I thought, would want to attend hangings. I was so desperate to get off my office stool I was almost prepared to pull the lever. I decided to give the office a miss and apply for the job straight away. Believe it or not, when I got to the Tanganyikan government office, I found a queue about 6 deep and about ½ mile long - all keen as mustard to attend hangings!

Aviation Connections

Towards the end of 1924 I came out to Australia with a letter of introduction to a man called Sir Keith Smith – I'll get back to him later on in this talk. In 1920 the London *Times* offered a prize of 10,000 pounds for the first flight England to South Africa. Captains S Cockerell and F C Broome left England for the flight London to Cape Town. From memory, South African van Ryneveld won the race flying a DH9. Broome and Cockerrell were flying Vickers Vimy, but about half way over their plane went missing for about three weeks. Special strips had to be prepared for refuelling purposes and petrol in 4-gallon tins was carried in by African carriers who had never seen petrol before. They couldn't see the sense of carrying in what they thought was water when there was an abundance of water at the place they were going to – so they punched holes in the cans and carried the empty tins to the airstrip and there refilled them with water. Broome and Cockerrell took off on their gravity [fuel tank] and after flying for a few minutes switched on the main tank, the engine promptly conked out and they force landed in the jungle, both were unhurt and eventually rescued. Tony Broome was a great friend of my family and when he heard I was going out to Australia he gave me a letter of introduction to Sir Keith Smith, the surviving Smith brother who were first past the post in the 1919 England to Australia race, also in a Vickers Vimy.

Life in Rural Australia

I met an Australian girl, a country girl, who lived in the same boarding house in London and she told me her brother, who had a mixed wheat/sheep property at the foot of the Warrumbungle Mountains of NSW, would be delighted to have me. On arrival at the property I found that the girl's brother was one of those types that loathes Pommies. The house was jerry-built and I often heard Ted Atkinson discussing the “*Pommy B*” who had been hoisted on them by his sister. I left after three weeks with an intense hatred of all Australian bushmen and proceeded to Sydney looking for a job; unsuccessfully, unfortunately.

I became on very friendly terms with Uncle Joe Mandleburg, the local pawn broker. I actually pawned everything I owned, except the clothes I stood up in. For four days I slept on seats in the Sydney Domain, and lived on one packet of 20 cigarettes and a three course meal costing 1 shilling a day. I shaved and washed in one of the local lavatories. I tried to ship before the mast [join as a merchant seaman], but with no success, not being a trade unionist. In desperation I called on Keith Smith with a letter of introduction from Tony Broome.

He advised me to become a Jackaroo on *Kings Plains* a large station property in the Glenn Innes district owned by a Dr Vivers. I have mentioned him before. At any rate I got to know the man on the land and consider them the salt of the earth. After leaving *Kings Plains* I jackarooed on a 10,000 acre property called *Stockdale* in the Gundagai district, owned by the Macarthur-Onslows for about two years and then bought a 1,400 acre property in the Burratorang Valley. A few months after I bought the property, which I foolishly called "*Cramwell Park*", the Great Depression hit the country and I lived on six bob a week and rabbits for quite a considerable time. I then became Manager of a sheep and cattle property called *Jurylands* which was opposite my selection in the Burratorang valley.

About 1934 I became farm manager at *Camden Park*, but only lasted about a year. I have no great love of farming sheep - cattle are more my kettle of fish. I then managed a small fattening property in the Singleton district for the Macarthur Onslows.

In the Islands

But as I could see no future on the land I accepted a job in Fiji with a gold prospecting company as Confidential Clerk. The gold mining lease was situated on a mountain about 1,200 feet above sea level on the Fijian island of Vanua Levu – a most god forsaken place, but then most gold mines are found in god forsaken places of the earth. It rained every day of the 21 months I was there. Malcolm Cameron, later of Goroka, who had spent 5 years on Mt Cassie mine which was next to our lease, told me that it had rained every day during his stay there. I returned to Sydney in 1937, got interested in the cement business financed by Arthur Onslow, father of Ted and Denzil Onslow. Everything looked promising, but Arthur Onslow died suddenly and my prospects of making oodles of money went up in smoke. I then took a job as Field Secretary with the *Papananipe Oil Company* at a place on the coast called Aiopa on the Gulf of Papua.

Outbreak of WW2

Being in the RAAF reserve, I left the oil company on the day after war broke out and proceeded to Moresby to get the [steamship] *Macduhi*, which took me south for my examination and entry into the Air Force. I was then posted to 23 Squadron at Archerfield, an aerodrome just outside of Brisbane. Sometime late in 1939 or 1940, *Air Chief Marshal* Sir Charles Barnett of the RAF was on his way from London to Melbourne to take up his appointment as Chief of the Air Staff of the RAAF. On his way through [Brisbane] he dropped in on the Squadron and had lunch with us. Being the only First War bloke, he talked to me quite a lot and questioned me on my service in the RNAS and RAF in the first show. Out of the blue he asked 'and what do you do in the Squadron, Primrose?'

'*I'm the Intelligence Officer*' I said with great gusto and pride.

'*Why?*' said he,

'*Bugged if I know*' said I - which rather rocked him, until the CO told him I was from Papua where every second word we used was *bugger*- he forgave me.

General MacArthur

American Lieutenant General George H Brett, in his book *The MacArthur I Knew*. was serving on General MacArthur's headquarters and came to know his dramatic floor pacing habits. It was seen in its most impressive form perhaps at his rare and notable press conferences. At one such conference at GHQ in Brisbane, late in 1943, the 30 or more war correspondents and officers rose as the General made an impressive entry –bare headed, grave, distinguished looking, immaculate. His right arm was raised in salute. There was no other introduction. Pacing too and fro, almost the entire length of the conference room McArthur immediately began his statement of the military situation. His phrasing was perfect, his speech clear and unhalting, except for pauses for dramatic emphasis. The correspondents took notes but there was

no interruptions of any kind. The conference room had become a stage, McArthur the virtuoso, the other officers were “extras” in the cast and the correspondents the audience. It was a dramatic occasion. The statement ended. The General again raised his right arm in salute and strode from the room followed by one or two staff officers. The conference was over. One man alone had spoken, the Supreme Commander. There was no questioning, no opportunity to clarify the meaning of the statements, it had come from the lips of General Douglas McArthur and as such was evidently beyond question. In my opinion General McArthur was the greatest showman in the 2nd World War. In his book he took all the credit for victory in the Pacific Theatre. He almost ignored the US Navy and Marines and hardly mentions the Australians’ part in the war. He takes full credit for island hopping, but in reading official histories, one finds the US Navy and Marines started this practice long, long, before McArthur ever thought of it. This just goes to prove that if you want to get on in this world, blow your own trumpet.

Security

Australians torturing a Vietnamese girl, and this becoming a [political issue](#), reminds me of my early days in the 2nd World War when I was security officer at 23 Squadron at Archerfield. We had a transmitting station, surrounded by a barbed wire fence, about ½ mile from the aerodrome. The wireless hut was floodlit at night and I had given strict instructions to all sentries to shoot without challenging anyone inside or getting through the barbed wire fence. One night after a very pleasant evening at the *Bellevue Hotel* I decided to inspect the wireless station on my way back to Archerfield. To my horror I found the Sentry sitting fast asleep on the veranda of the wireless hut.

Remembering my instructions to shoot without challenge anyone getting through the fence I hesitated for quite a while, but as something had to be done, and I had an excess of Dutch courage, having had a few *Bundaberg Rums* during the evening, I crept through the fence, walked up to the hut, took possession of the rifle and woke the Sentry up. I put him under arrest, changed the Sentries and had him up before the CO of 23 Squadron the next day. His excuse was that he was tired and sleepy before going on duty, so he was given seven days Sentry Duty as a punishment.

That evening I went to another very enjoyable evening at the *Bellevue* and with the same amount of Dutch courage decided to again inspect the wireless station on my way home. To my horror, I again found the same Sentry, fast asleep. After a long period of agonising mental debate, I again climbed through the fence, took possession of the rifle and woke the sentry up.

Two nights asleep on duty, when thousands were clamouring to get into the Air Force, was too much for the C.O. and a signal was sent to Air Board Melbourne, strongly recommending the dismissal of the Sentry. Air Board agreed to his dismissal, but instructed that his uniforms and all his Air Force gear had to be returned before he left Archerfield. Being a Melbourneite, this would have meant that he had to travel to Melbourne in his underpants and singlet, as he had no civilian clothes with him. Being the prime factor in getting him booted out of the Air Force, I felt a bit of a heel and that night suggested that we have a collection of civilian clothes for him. I donated a very nice hat and a pair of almost new flannel trousers. The others almost without exception donated something and the airman departed for Melbourne with more civilian clothes and better dressed than he had ever been. On his arrival home he naturally had a very big shame and told his parents he hadn’t the foggiest idea why he had been booted out of the Air Force. To back up this statement he pointed out that the security officer and other officers of the squadron had outfitted him with an abundance of civilian clothes. His parents contacted their local Member of Parliament, questions were asked in the House as to why this airman had been wrongfully dismissed. It took the CO about 3 months to convince the powers that be that the only reason the airman was so abundantly outfitted was because we did not want him to return to his home in Victoria half naked.

It makes me ashamed to be British when I have to listen to or read the tripe generally in large type on the front page of the local newspapers, spouted by some Australian politician, the latest about an Australian soldier in Vietnam shooting a wounded enemy. Some damn journalist wrote this in a book and got free publicity that would have cost him hundreds if not thousands of dollars otherwise, and then one finds that the source of his information is second hand. I had still to hear any queries as to why practically no prisoners of war were taken at Milne Bay when Australia was in dire danger of invasion by the Japanese. What would

this MHR have done had he been a stretcher bearer and knew that in attending a wounded Jap he was likely to be blown to kingdom come by the wounded Jap pulling out the pin of a hand grenade, and blowing himself and the stretcher bearer up. I take it our *Right Honourable Member* of Parliament would have kissed him not shot him. The next howl from Parliament House will be that diggers in Vietnam are actually shooting the enemy first and not waiting, like a sporting MHR would, to give the enemy first shot. I'd better stop as my ulcer is getting all started up.

Security at its best!

Whilst acting Senior Intelligence Officer and stationed at Townsville, headquarters of North Eastern Area. Mum and I had a flat on the Townsville waterfront. Arriving home one afternoon, Mum greeted me with the news that a convoy was sailing the next day. I promptly rang my opposite number in the RAN a 2 ½ striper and asked him if the news was correct. Being the *Silent Service*, the Navy wallah never told me anything and was quite concerned, and demanded to know Mum's source of information.

I told him the baker had given Mum the news. And how the devil did he know? Well the day before the convoy was due to leave, over 1,000 loaves of bread were ordered. Large orders of bread were always ordered the day before convoys were due to sail. I don't think the Navy ever found the answer to this one.

Psychological Warfare

Security can certainly be carried to stupid limits. The last unit I served with – Psychological Warfare – dropping leaflets and broadcasting to the enemy -called themselves for some unknown reason, the *Far Eastern Liaison Office*, or FELO, and were so security-minded that all maps were covered with blinds.

I might mention that the unit's mention in war histories is anything but flattering. I personally got a most enjoyable five months temporary posting to India, attached to Lord Mountbatten's *South East Asian Command* based in Kandy in Ceylon. I flew over in a Liberator in what was known as the *Kangaroo Hop*. Perth/Exmouth Gulf/Ceylon and coming back Ceylon/Perth direct a flight of about 19 hours. The Liberators were flying tankers and only carried a handful of passengers and official mail. All passengers were given certificates to prove they had done the *Kangaroo Hop*. Before the Liberators took over the run, Catalina [flying boats] were used. It took them 26 hours in the air direct from Perth to Colombo and the same amount of hours return. Passengers were then issued with a certificate called the *Order of the Double Sunrise*.

Up to the early part of 1944, as far as I know, and this what happened in the Pacific region, air crew shot down and captured by the enemy were instructed to only give name, rank and serial number. Unfortunately, the Japanese would not follow the Geneva convention in their treatment of POWs and translation of captured Japanese documents showed in nearly every case captured airmen gave the interrogator all the information they had, which couldn't have been much use to the enemy in any case. There was a difference of opinion as to how the Japanese got the information. Some thought it was by torture, others by using some sort of a truth pill. Instructions were then given to tell freely, an excellent decision I thought for any unfortunate aircrew who happened to be captured.

Basic Training

On joining the RNAS in June 1917, I was sent to Grenish College for six weeks training – squad drills lectures etc. The commander of the station was an *Admiral of the Fleet* Sir Something Jackson. Masses of lower rank Admirals, Commodores, Captains and Commanders, Lieutenant Commanders etc were on the Royal Navy staff. About 40 of us were on the course, and being probationary Flight Officers had to be addressed as "Sir". A Regimental Sergeant Major of the Royal Marines took our first drill. A magnificent specimen of a man, straight as a gun barrel, fine waxed moustache and a swagger -stick under his arm. Looking up and down the ranks for some considerable time - a look that clearly indicated that we were something the cat dragged in - he roared "*Sirs, before I proceed in trying to make Naval Officers out of you, and by the look of you I doubt if I can, I want you to remember and never forget, there are only two men on this station that matter- I, and the Admiral.*" – And by heavens he was right!

This also reminds me of the time a friend of mine came on parade incorrectly dressed. Looking him up and down the RSM roared "*Mr Kafoops Sir, two paces forward march*", wiping an imaginary tear from his eye

he then stated in a very low voice *“The good book said that Jesus wept, but if he saw you now, he’d ‘owl’”*. These first war regular Sergeant Majors were fearsome men and I feel sure that if our RSM had ordered us to march to certain death we would have done so. The expression – so death where is thy sting – was probably originated from frightened squads being so instructed.

SONG THEN PLAYS [“KISS ME GOODNIGHT SERGEANT MAJOR!”](#)

Diggers in the First War were noted for not saluting officers. If they did, one could be sure they either wanted to kiss, fight or borrow a few bob. This reminds me of the digger who went past General Birdwood (who commanded the Anzac force in Gallipoli) without saluting him. One of Birdwood’s ADCs was livid with rage and dashed back and reprimanded the digger for not saluting.

“And why should I?” said the digger,

“Don’t you know that that’s General Birdwood???” asked the ADC.

“Well,” said the digger, *“Why doesn’t he wear feathers on his bottom, like any other bird would?”*

My other story concerns the English officer who had just received his commission and his first pip. As he wasn’t saluted by a digger who passed him, he retraced his steps, tapped the digger on the shoulder and proceeded to tick him off. The digger looked him up and down and said *“Oh go and put your head in a bag you stupid B…”*

The Subaltern was livid with rage, and on sighting an Australian Colonel, walked towards him and at two paces from him snapped to attention and saluted *“Sir”* he said, *“I have a very serious complaint to make. One of your men, a mere Private went past me without saluting, and when I ticked him off he called me a stupid B”*.

“Well” said the Colonel *“Are you?”*

“Of course not!” said the subaltern

“Well” said the Colonel *“You go back and call him a bloody liar.”*

Flight Training

While I was at Cranwell training on fighters (*Sopwith Pups* and *Camels*) I was (as an ex-seaman and not likely to be seasick when required to fly) selected for flying Spotting Aircraft off battleships. A platform was built over the forward big guns of the ship, which was then turned into the wind at full speed and the aircraft took off by “quick release” method. (A *Sopwith Pup* was put into flying position, the tail skid being attached to a strong post. When maximum revs were reached, a lever in the aircraft was pulled, releasing the skid and after a very short run the *Pup* was airborne.) I did about six of these “quick releases” quite successfully, but then the *Sopwith Pup* was a dream of an aircraft to fly.

I forgot to point out that after take-off from the gun platform and on completion of Spotting [in action at sea], the aircraft was put down in the ocean, as close to the side of the ship as possible. The pilot would then be picked up and the remains of the aircraft recovered if possible. Crash-landing safely, especially in choppy seas, in an aircraft with a fixed undercarriage, would, I think, have been beyond my capabilities as a pilot.

Up to the time I did my first solo in *Camels*, I really enjoyed piloting a plane. Once I got off the ground in the *Camel* I knew I had met my master. It was dihedral on the bottom wing and straight on the top wing. The camel had a vicious tendency to go into a spin in the right hand turn, our engines were rotary, this means that the whole engine and propeller turned around a fixed crankshaft. I never was game to do a right hand turn the few hours I flew a *Camel* and eventually I turned a *Camel* over on its back, taking off. This was caused by my knees bumping together in fear. This was my first prang, hanging upside down and unhurt was, I think, one of the happiest moments of my life.

I never flew *Camels* again. I think I am right in saying that more pilots were killed training in *Camels* than were ever shot down by the enemy. I am convinced that the *Camel* was the greatest “stunt” aircraft ever built.

After WW1

After the Armistice I was posted to 216 Handley Page squadron, located at Calais on the north coast of

France. We used to fly the mails to the British army of occupation stations in Cologne and Bonn Germany. My last flight as a pilot with the RAF, actually the last time I ever piloted a plane solo, I had, as passengers, a Brigadier General Hogg and his personal assistant. He was GOC RAF Army of Occupation. On the trip out I had a spot of port engine trouble, but as I was only carrying half my normal load, decided to carry on. The country between Archen and Cologne is undulating. As both my engines were now functioning very sweetly, I decided to get down to ground level and show the Brigadier General how good I was at hedge hopping. Having successfully hedge-hopped four or five times, I was horrified to see tall electric light poles looming up. Pulling the aircraft into a steep climb I cleared the poles, but at about 200 feet, for some unaccountable reason it got into an uncontrollable steep turn to the left.

While in the turn, my port engine cut out, sending the aircraft into an enormous vertical dive into the ground. In Handley Pages the layout from the front of the fuselage was nose gunner, two side by side seats, the pilot and observer, the pilot sitting on the right hand side. Bomb bays of 16 or 20, 112 pound bombs, I can't remember exactly, and the quite large open space for the rear gunner. Enough room in fact to take about 8 to 10 passengers. When we hit the ground the aircraft broke its back just after the bomb bay and the Brigadier General dislocated his shoulder, his personal assistant was shaken but not hurt, my observer was thrown about 40 feet and broke his leg. I was thrown just out of the cockpit with a broken nose, two beautiful black eyes and slight internal injuries.

We pranged near a Canadian camp which had a doctor on strength. Naturally the Brigadier General got first attention, and while the doctor was swinging his dislocated arm trying to get it back into its socket, the Brigadier proceeded to abuse me roundly and went back down my family tree on anything but complimentary terms for about 12 generations.

Prior to this prang I had every chance of getting a permanent or at least short term commission in the RAF. The Brigadier General's personal assistant, in the conversation with me a few days after the prang, advised me to give up all hope of staying in the RAF. - My hedge-hopping did anything but impress the Brigadier General, who abused me roundly and threatened to have me *Court Marshalled* or shot.

Ah well. Perhaps everything happens for the best for had I stayed in the RAF I probably would have ended up on a cloud strumming a harp or more likely down below shovelling coal.

If I'm talking too much Jocky, I'm afraid you are to blame, after all you did suggest I give you a fireside chat and now I find that I am giving you a fireside blast. Well as I am about to close this tape, I will say all the very best Otto, I hope you are having plenty of successful fishing, catching the big ones, not letting them get away. My very best love Jocelyn to you, Muffett and to Matthew. We have just received a post card from Uncle Phillip Jocky, he sounds very very miserable, just out of hospital. I don't know how long he's been in for, but I'd be very very grateful if you would drop him a line and cheer him up.

NAN TALKING: Hello Jocelyn, hello Otto, hello Jennifer, hello Matthew. I think Dad's told you everything he can on this tape and I've had a thoroughly exhausting month. Frank Dwyer knew what he was doing going on leave at this time. The United Nations visit has left me like a mass of jelly and the elections have left me like a flummery, however we are quite pleased with the results with Dennis getting in for the Regional and Sapume for the Urban. Tomorrow the United Nations are leaving fortunately. They are went to Kundiawa today. Terry White informed me today that they are going on a charter, but checking up with TAA today I found they are going on the ordinary run and they haven't got any tickets, so I had to make out a warrant for 14 or them. Be seeing you on the 23rd if I am not in jail after issuing that great big warrant. Saturday 6th April is our 26th Wedding Anniversary so we are going to have a bottle of champagne. End of the tapes coming up now. Please let me know very quickly if there is anything you want as I will have to do all my buying before I leave here, as I won't have much time in Lae or Moresby. Goodnight altogether.

PRIM AGAIN: Just to finish off the tape, I'll say, "*Goodnight everybody*".

My father **Patrick Stephen Jocelyn O'Connell Primrose** was born in Hong Kong on the 31st May 1900. His father Phillip Spencer Primrose was a Master mariner with the British Merchant Navy born in Lambeth England 1866.. His mother was called Alice Rosamond Smith. He had two elder brothers Phillip and Charles and a younger sister Eileen Mirena.

Some records ADM 273/18/221 Royal Naval Air Service. At National Archives Kew.

Grandfather Daniel O Connell Primrose born Kerry Ireland about 1835. Married Alvina (or Elvina) Mary Norris who was born in Calcutta India on 28 Mar 1839. Other grandfather John Smith of the Straits Settlements. Grandmother possible E Spain not confirmed yet.

His mother died when he was three or thereabouts. He family were living in Singapore at that time and moved back to England in about 1907. They moved in with his aunt (His father's sister Nellie Ricarda Bernhein whose husband Emile was a diamond trader from South Africa. They lived at 13 Bolton Gardens Kensington. They had four children. One Vera Bovie from a previous marriage and a boy Gaston and two girls. There were eight servants in the house and one a Miss Charlotte Hudson became his nanny. . Miss Hudson was still alive after WW2. During the war Dad and Mum sent food parcels to her and in exchange she sent me books I remember one was the Secret Garden. She was a very important person in Dad's early life. He was sent to school in Belgium at a young age and ran away when he was about 13 or fourteen. We have found him on a ship the Ormara out of Calcutta to Australia in 1915 to 1917. His father remarried in 1911 in Calcutta Isabella Robbins. They had two children Terence and Agnes. We think he died about 1917 in China. He respected his father, but I don't think he liked him very much. Couldn't stand his sister I think she was very spoilt, and then she married a Dutchman!

Phillip was gassed in the trenches in WW1 and stayed in France after the war. He married a Frenchwoman called Jeannie and they had one son Patrick. He worked for a shipping line. Patrick married a Lebanese woman called Blanche and they had two daughters Jennifer and Priscilla. Patrick had Parkinson's disease and has died – we have been in touch with Priscilla, she is married with a son and daughter – daughter married with two girls. Blanche died ten days after Patrick of lung cancer and Jennifer also died – she never married.

Charles also fought in WW1, and according to Dad was later killed in the Balkans fighting as a mercenary. We have since learnt that he did not die, but went and lived in India, where he married and had two children – a boy and a girl. The boy Phillip was also a seaman, who jumped ship in New Zealand, finally was allowed to stay, married a New Zealander, has four children (two boys and two girls), and several grandchildren. The girl Zena lived in America and had five children.

Sister Eileen was never spoken about.

Dad was sent to a school in Belgium when he was quite young. His main memories were of beatings and cold showers. He finally at the age of thirteen threw an inkwell at a teacher and ran away to sea as a cabin boy. The boat was a sailing boat, and he had some hair raising stories of sailing round the Cape of Good Hope.

He obviously returned to his family at some time and persuaded one of his aunts to sign papers saying he was older than he was, so he could go and fight in WW1. I assume his father was dead by that time.

As he describes in his talks, he learnt to fly, and at the age of seventeen, was flying bombers over Germany. Then there was the four years in Malaysia, and then to Australia in 1924.

He covers this early period in Australia and Fiji in some detail. The main gap is a marriage in 1938. This was not long before he went to Papua, and the whole thing still is a mystery. (Later, we have solved the mystery – Mum haunted Carramar and eventually we kept looking and with the help of Lucy Read discovered that he was married to a

Barbara Eaton Carnegie in March 1938, the interesting thing is that she did not die, and therefore when he married Mum he was still married to her. There was a divorce in 1951 ten years after he married Mum It must have been dreadful for them living with this things are different these days luckily)

He returned to Australia to enlist when war broke out, and was initially posted to Archerfield in Brisbane, where he would have met Nan. He then spend time in the Middle East with three Squadron and Papua New Guinea with 75th Squadron. He also spent time in India and Townsville.

Mum and Dad were married in 1942.

I was born in 1944 and Penny in 1946.

Mum and Dad ran a cafe in Surfers Paradise from sometime in 1945. It was in Cavill Avenue – where McDonalds is now. Unfortunately they could not buy the cafe, but only leased it. It was quite a good business – they also had a mini golf course. Much of the profits were eaten and drunk by old Air Force friends who would come down for weekends “to help”. Anyhow a good time was had by all. In 1951, they bought a house in Mermaid Beach. We moved in and soon after Dad was offered a job in New Guinea by Bobby Gibbes an old Air Force mate. He flew up in about May of that year followed by Nan and kids who sailed up on the Bulolo.

He was Branch Manager for Gibbes Sepik Airways in Goroka. Eventually, after living in some rented dumps Dad and Mum sold the house in Mermaid Beach and build a house in Goroka. At some stage he had a falling out with Bobby’s wife and resigned. He had a small acreage outside Goroka where he grew vegetables, which were mainly sent to Lae and Port Moresby. He had two problems here. The car an old wartime Willys jeep gave up the ghost and his neighbours, supposedly friends, diverted water so that it no longer went through his block. He was unable to get a loan to buy a car, and by the time he sorted out the water problem, he had lost several crops, So he gave up and sold the land. He then got a job with the Papua New Guinean Government as a clerk with the Transport Department. He was still working there when he died in November 1968 at the age of 68.

I was on leave in Sydney when this happened, so flew back with Jenny. Matthew and Otto followed later. All the shops in Goroka closed for the funeral as a mark of respect. He is buried in Goroka this is what he wanted.

I should add here that he was christened Stephen Patrick, but changed it to Patrick Stephen (most of the family seemed to do this). Sometime after coming to Australia he added Jocelyn O’Connell to his name. The Jocelyn was his godfather’s family name, and that is how I acquired it. I have discovered Captain Joslin – he worked with my grandfather for many years on the Hongkong Bangkok run, obviously when Dad claimed the name he did not know how to spell it! I think I prefer my current spelling.

I will now talk about my father’s ancestors.

His father **Philip Spencer Primrose** was born in London on the 1st May 1866. He had a twin sister Evangeline Mary who died at about two months. He had an older sister Nellie Ricarda (more about her later), there was also another sister Bessie Agnes who was younger. She married Kunt Harold Sundberg in Calcutta on the 26 October 1894. We have no more details about them.

Nellie was born in India, but the family was back in England for Philip’s birth. They went back because his grandfather John Primrose was dying. They did not make it in time.

The family eventually returned to Calcutta India. Philip was schooled in London. In the 1881 census he was boarding with a family called Pidcock. Several of his female cousins were there at the same time.

He obtained his Captain’s certificate in Bengal in 1893 (No 156 Lloyds register). He then moved to Hong Kong where he captained a ship the “Taichow”, which went from Hong Kong to Bangkok. On 21st September 1896 he married Alice Rosamond (Dolly) Smith at St John’s Cathedral Hong Kong. There were four children Philip O’Connell born 5.2.1897, Charles born 1899, Patrick Stephen born 1900 and Eileen Mirena date of birth unknown. There were various incidents at sea (copies attached). He lost his job in Hong Kong when he changed the Plimsoll Line on his boat – a false one had been put on, he sued and won 1,000 HK dollars! Finally obtained a position in Singapore on a small boat called the Ban Whatt Soon. Sailed between Singapore and Pontiniak in Borneo. I think he was sacked when the boat grounded and he was very drunk on deck – cleared a board of inquiry! I think Alice had died by this time. The family were still in Singapore in 1906 Philip O’Connell was at the Raffles Girls School –it took boys in lower classes. They must have returned to England early 1907, and moved in with Nellie and her family. The boys were sent to boarding school in Belgium. Philip was back in Calcutta in 1911, and married again to Isabella Constance Robbinson 31 October 1911, she was 23. They had two children Terence and Agnes. Philip died in China, not sure when. Isabella married John Joseph Doyle on 20 December 1927.

Alice Rosamond Smith my grandmother. We know very little about her. Her father was John Smith and we think she was born in Singapore, possible on the 25 December 1877. Her mother may have been E Spain. She died sometime before 1906. We know she travelled with my grandfather on the Taichow. Their second son Charles was christened in Bancoek in March 1900, my father was born in Hong Kong in May of that year.

Daniel O'Connell Primrose was my paternal Great grandfather. He was born in Kerry Ireland in 1835. His parents were **John Primrose** and **Ricarda O'Connor**. His siblings were Betsy born 1833, Philip – died in Melbourne, did not marry and was in the army, James married and lived in America, Ellen, did not marry and died in England in 1862. Daniel was in the Kerry Militia and became an Ensign. He was at a boarding house in London on the night of the 1861 census (gentleman on his travels) as was **Elvina Norris** (lady on her travels). Am not sure if that is where they met, but they were married in Calcutta on the 16th October 1862. As stated previously they had three children Nellie Philip and Bessie. Daniel worked for the Railway. We have not found his death notice yet. Elvina died in 1879. It is possible he had already died or returned to Ireland.

Elvina Norris was born in Calcutta on the 28th March 1829. Her parents were **Robert Moncrieff Norris** and **Charlotte Stewart**. Charlotte had previously been married to James Stewart. There were five children from that marriage and five from the marriage to Robert.

Prim's Chronology of Letters

Nov 1940 - At sea

27/12/40 to end December 1941 - 3 Squadron Middle East - usually just "abroad"

No letters till 26/4/1942 - Married in Brisbane 6/4/1942.

26/4/1942 to 9/6/1942 - Garbut, Townsville Station Intelligence Officer

6/8/1942 to 4/10/1942 - Port Moresby variously "Group S" or Group X"

16/11/1942 - 24/1/1944 - Intelligence Section NEA Townsville, - Group 837 N AFPO 71 Townsville.

Nan then went to live with Prim in Townsville, so no letters.

9/1/45 to 11/2/1945 - PW Division Forward Base S.A.C.S.E.A. India.

Said he would return from India about end March. No further letters.

Throughout they worked very long hours. In the Middle East they managed some leave now and again - In July 1941 he and friends went as far as Damascus for sightseeing/shopping! His car accident was on 27/8/1941.

In Port Moresby they lived in shared tents. He was often with Pete Turnbull, [Lex Winton and Les Jackson](#) who all came and went. Even at the end August crescendo in Milne Bay there is no mention of any fighting or bombing. He was of course very sad to tell Nan when he could about Pete's death.

While in Townsville all the ex 3 Squadron types would stay with him on their way back and forward, and he describes their condition to Nan. Many of them go to see her when in Brisbane. He was distressed about John Jackson who had helped he and Nan in so many personal ways. Nan became close to John Jackson's mother and best friends to Les' wife Cynthia. He saw Ed Jackson regularly. He mentions having a bunch of WAAFs working for him, very efficient apparently.

Jocelyn and I knew many of these wonderful people when they settled close to each other on the Gold Coast after the war.