

First Ferry Story from Bushy

Hello Fellow Pigcrew,

A story from the first ferry since Barrington and Ferret have already made a contribution for later groups. I was on my second jaunt to the States, but this time with a more sober crew than the first time when we trained for the F-4 at Davis-Monthan AFB. At that time as a newly promoted flight lieutenant I was the senior RAAF officer – much to the consternation of the USAF major who was supposed to look after the foreign students, but someone else can tell the yarns about that course. For this trip we had a group captain, a couple of wing commanders and many squadron leaders, so needed to behave. Apart from that my wife came along.

I took the family with me for the training at Nellis and flying out of McClennan to honour a promise. When I arrived back from the F-4 training I made the mistake of saying “it’s a great country. If I go back I will take you.” Of course I didn’t dream I would get a second trip, but when I did a promise is a promise.

I do not recall any of the RAAF instructional crews training us at Nellis. My IP was Mike Bennert who later came to Amberley on exchange. I remember one trip where they had this ridiculous task of bombing two targets within a few miles of each other. They called it a large charge. A mad rush after the first run to reset the coordinates and do a run on the second target. Like any smug instructor Mike was sitting there exuding the attitude of bet you can’t do it. I didn’t think I could either but the range dudes gave me a shack on both targets, so you have to be lucky sometimes. After seven flights with the USAF IPs we started flying with our RAAF crew. I was fortunate in having a pilot who knew the aircraft well from the first attempt to collect them – Ian Westmore.

We picked A8-127 up from the factory on 6 Apr 73 and on the way back to McClennan thought we would do a circuit at Nellis. Not a good idea. A flap vane came loose and our brand new aircraft had to land at Nellis for repairs. Nevertheless arrived at McLellan after 4.2 hours from Fort Worth. That made three RAAF pigs for the six crews to fly.

The time at McClennan was spent in flying around the area, being horrified by bug smashers in the circuit of airfields where we did a few circuits: “oh, he’s VFR” said the ATC puke. Couldn’t do much real flying because we had those damn jugs on the wings. Just one more trip in April then seven sorties in May before setting off for Hickam on 28th.

Across the pond was no drama. Westy was much amused when I was going to cut my wrists as the ground speed fell below 300 kts on the Pago Pago to Amberley leg. That became a six hour leg. Finally arrived on 1 Jun 73, although in my log book the flight is 31 May out of Pago Pago, to a high powered welcoming party. As luck would have it we had Jake Newham there to deal with them, so not a worry.

Sadly I got only the one tour on the Vark, and even more sadly I was an instructor nav in six squadron so didn't get as much flying as the regular squadron navs. Apart from that in the early days the ratio of strap ins to getting some air between bum and ground was pretty high. Flight control computer or some other gadget would crap out, so back to the crew room. Rarely was there a spare.

I was fortunate to go through the Canberra, Phantom then F-111 stream so can't complain. Not often a man gets a go on three types in his first 10 years of flying.

Best wishes to all,

Bushy (John Bushell)