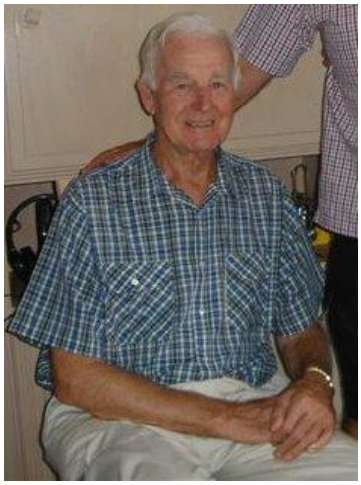
WING COMMANDER GEORGE "PETER" BRETT BAILEY (K34-38)



Peter was born on 28 March 1922 and left the College at 17. He spent a year in the City so he could join the RAF aged 18 in January 1941 as a cadet pilot.

He received his "wings" in Canada in April 1942 where he worked for a year as an instructor. He then transferred to Bomber Command where he flew Wellingtons before transferring to 233 Squadron Transport Command prior to D Day operations in Normandy. He became a glider tug pilot and towed **Bryan Hebblethwaite (34-39)** on D Night. Bryan returned and Peter towed him again over Arnhem where sadly Bryan was killed. Peter then transferred to 234 Squadron in the Pacific working in New Guinea, Borneo and the Philippines.

After WW2 he was as a pilot involved in the Berlin Airlift, which lasted from June 1948 to June 1949. With a Dakota he flew 250 times to Berlin and back. On 53rd anniversary of the ending of the Berlin Airlift, Peter attended a ceremony that was reported in the Berlin Morning Post of 13 May 2002. Peter is quoted as saying "At the beginning of the air lift the living conditions were very chaotic around the airport, but the longer the airlift lasted, the better it became." During the blockade airplanes landed day and night. By June 1949 American, British and French airplanes had brought nearly two million tons of goods into the cut off West Berlin.

In 1950 Peter was posted on an exchange between the RAF and Australian airforce and joined 34 Squadron as Flight Commander of the Royal Australian Air Force VIP Squadron based at RAAF Richmond near Sydney. He flew many dignitaries including Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies. He returned to the UK in 1953 and worked as a Staff Officer in the Air Ministry Intelligence Branch. In 1955, Peter was selected to be OC 89 Squadron and worked at RAF Germany on photoreconnaissance work until 1958. He was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air before returning to join Operations Staff at the MOD from 1959-61.

In 1963, Peter became OC of the RAF VIP Squadron based at RAF Northolt. Between 1963 and 1964, he flew many VIPs including Sir Winston Churchill, Lord Mountbatten and HM Queen Elizabeth II (VIP Squadron helped out when the Queen's flight needed back-up). He also flew Sir Dermot Boyle, then Marshal of the RAF, to the College on Speech Day 1959 to present the prizes.

After flying VIPs, Peter returned to Europe one more time as Wing Commander Operations, RAF Germany and finally as Wing Commander Flying/Operations at RAF Wyton in the UK operating Victors, Canberra and Comets.

Peter retired from the RAF in 1970 and emigrated to South Africa to run a game farm. In 1978, he returned to the UK and ran a Government Youth Training Scheme until emigrating and retiring to Australia in 1986.

Peter has included the following thoughts in the SOF publication "Their Swords in our Keeping" which was first published in 2005

"I was an RAF Pilot on No. 233 Squadron and towed gliders on all three operations mentioned in the 'Glider Pilot' article on page 32 of The Old Framlinghamian of Spring 2004. All RAF and Glider Pilots carried out extensive training early in 1944 prior to the advent of D-Day. I was flying Dakotas from RAF Blakehill Farm (Transport Command) in Wiltshire and was fortunate enough to team up with **Bryan Hebblethwaite (R34 - 39)** who was a Glider Pilot. I towed Bryan in the second glider to be dropped on Pegasus Bridge on the night of 5/6 June. The six gliders of 6th Airborne Division made history that night by holding the bridge against heavy odds until relieved by the main force. Bryan and his co-pilot Banks returned to our unit unscathed about two weeks later amid much celebration!

The next airborne operation, 'Market Garden,' at Arnhem was to follow on 17 September and it was my privilege again to tow Brian with Banks piloting their Horsa Glider with 1st Airborne Division. The operation suffered huge losses and sadly both Brian and Banks were killed by mortar fire on 19 September fighting in the

ground battle. Brian was a very special friend and so modest - what a waste of life, aged 21 years. I have visited Brian's grave on one of my visits to Oosterbeek Cemetery."

"I remember **David Brook (S36-40)** quite well at school and had no idea he was a glider pilot in WWII but thanks to the good offices of the OF magazine, I have become a member of the Glider Pilots Regiment Association and on the mailing list of "The Eagle." David, its Editor, responds saying that he sat next to Brian in Chapel and says the GPRA records show that he landed approx. 3 miles to the East of Pegasus Bridge on LZ K close to the village of Barent. He and his first pilot S/Sgt. Banks were in 'F' Squadron. David was at Blakehill Farm too and wondered if Peter towed him to Colchester from where they flew on 'Varsity' in March 1945, but it turned out that Peter's last airborne operation was Arnhem in September 1944. David writes: "I have been trying for 20 years to find some reference to Brian's service without any luck in spite of receiving so much material as Editor. Now, within three weeks, I not only heard from Peter but, quite coincidentally, I heard from another glider pilot, Michael Watts "that Brian and Banks landed their Horsa immediately behind his glider on D-Day! Watts was also close to Brian at Arnhem and saw him being killed. Apparently a flight of FW190s saw Brian and others run to take cover under trees which the planes attacked with machine gun fire, killing Brian. I now have reports of what happened to him from two firsthand sources."

At a Queensland OF Supper in February 2009, he recalled the following additional story :-

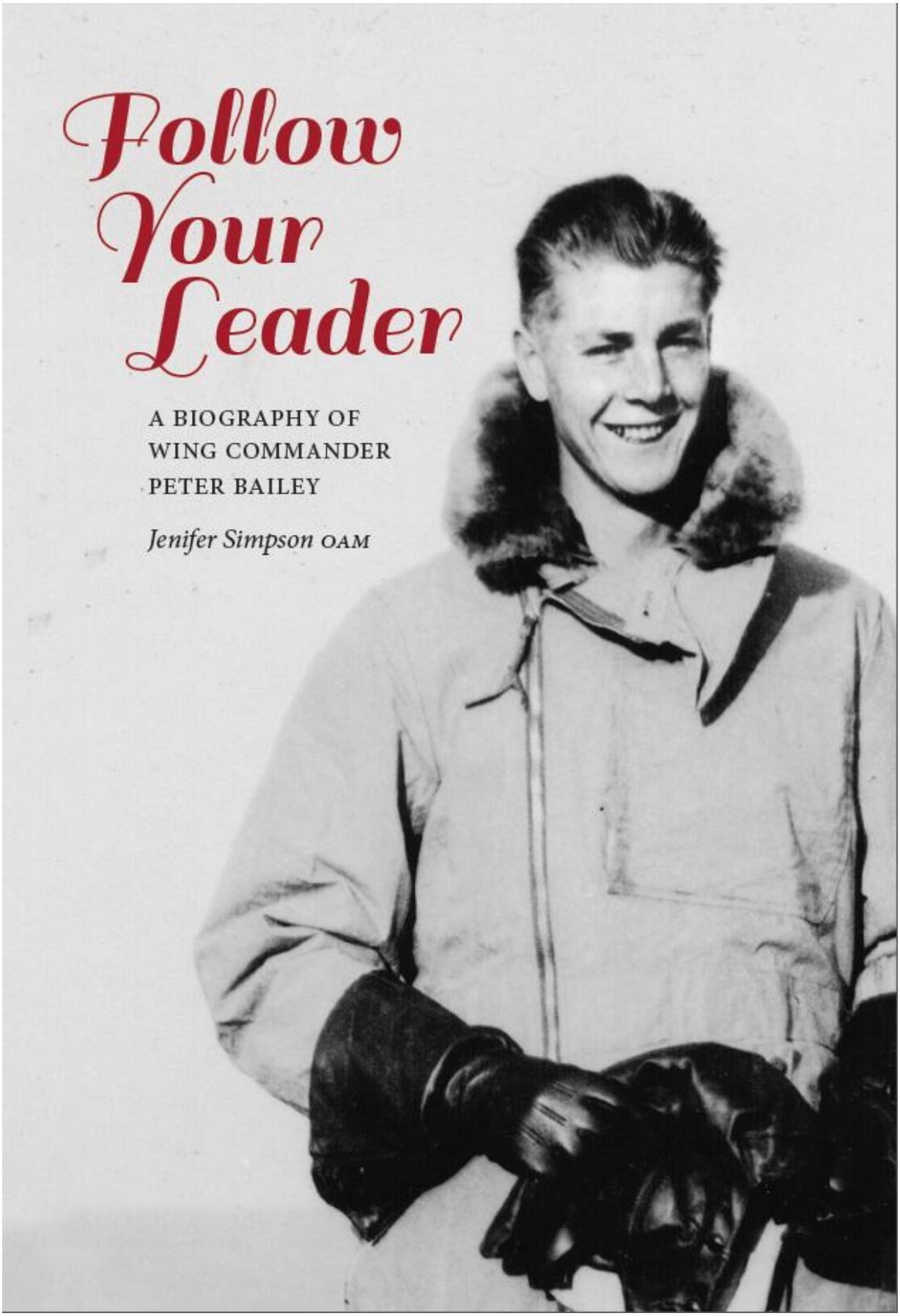
"Peter told us how he was flying DC3's the night after D-day, re-supplying troops who had landed on the Normandy beaches. A plane next to him, piloted by his friend Errol Wood, was badly hit by enemy fire and went down in flames. Peter watched hopelessly as it plunged earthward. Wind forward 60 years and the phone rings in Peter's house: it is Errol's son-in-law who is doing some family history research wanting to get in touch with his father-in-law's RAF colleagues. Peter explained how he saw Errol's plane shot down in flames and had believed all these years that Errol had perished to which the response was, "Well, you will never believe this but Errol got out and is now living in Tasmania!" It appears that his DC3 crash-landed on the Normandy beach and the whole crew got out with minor injuries but before they could make their escape across the water, they were captured and spent the rest of the war as POW's. Errol survived this ordeal and eventually emigrated to Australia, to live a (long) stone's throw from Peter Bailey unbeknown to either of them. They have since met up and had the most joyous of reunions."

In 2014 Jenifer Simpson OAM (no relation to the College Simpsons) sat down with Peter and documented his amazing life in great detail. We are very grateful to both of them for allowing us to include the full biography below.

Follow Your Leader

A BIOGRAPHY OF
WING COMMANDER
PETER BAILEY

Jenifer Simpson OAM



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“He who has never learned to obey
cannot be a good commander.”

ARISTOTLE

“The function of leadership is to produce
more leaders, not more followers.”

RALPH NADER

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The study in Peter Bailey's house is full of fascinating memorabilia, each piece waiting to tell of its part in his eventful and varied life. The walls are covered with photos and pictures, a favourite flying suit hangs from the door and his medals are displayed in a cabinet. Models of his favourite planes – the Dakota and the Canberra – feature on a shelf. There are thank you letters and gifts from the famous people he has flown around the world, including a photograph from Her Majesty and a bust of Winston Churchill.

Here is a story that needs to be told. Memories of our heroes should be captured and recorded before they are lost to future generations.

Thank you, Peter, for letting me into your life and sharing it with me. I have learned such a lot.

Jenifer Simpson OAM

FOREWARD

I met Peter Bailey in 2006 when my wife and I moved into Living Choice Retirement Village. Peter and I discovered our common background in the RAF and RAAF very soon after meeting – although Peter's Air Force experience was much longer that mine. Since then we've shared many stories, particularly concerning the Canberra aeroplane that we both flew. We've also shared many glasses of red wine and, God willing, will continue to do so for some time.

Jenifer Simpson's short biography covers the significant aspects of Peter's colourful life. As for many others of his time, WWII was the trigger that began his flying career, spanning from 1942 until 1968 and covering WWII Transport flying, VIP Transport flying in Australia and the United Kingdom, commanding a Canberra P/R7 (photographic reconnaissance) squadron in Germany in the 1950s and commanding a flying base back in the UK. After his resignation from the RAF his life was no less interesting. He spent several years in South Africa raising game birds before his final retirement and emigration to Australia.

Follow Your Leader, with its accompanying photographs, is easy to read and would be well appreciated by anybody who has known Peter in the past or has had the pleasure of meeting him in his retirement.

Peter Jerdan

Flt Lt No 2 (B) Sqn, RAAF (Retired)
Senior Check Captain (B747), Cathay Pacific Airways (Retired)

Wings to Fly

Cecil Bailey, the son of a well-to-do Leicestershire farmer, harnessed his horse and set off in the trap to the station to collect a distant relative from Canada. Flora Hunter was taking the opportunity to make the acquaintance of her English and Scottish relatives. Cecil was captivated by her and knew that he had met the woman with whom he wanted to share his life – and she reciprocated. It was 1914 and there were already signs of unrest in Europe. They became engaged, but with the outbreak of war three years were to pass before they became man and wife.

Cecil, a countryman of some social standing, was an officer in the Leicestershire Yeomanry, a cavalry regiment, and he went to France with two horses; both were killed. Cecil became one of the millions of soldiers injured in this bloody war of attrition. Towards the end of the war his leg was shattered and he spent a year in hospital recovering and learning to walk again. He improved sufficiently to captain the Suffolk cricket team, following a recommended move to Suffolk where the climate would be good for his health and the flatter ground would be easier to manage. He bought a mixed farm (dairy, poultry and arable) in Snape, where he and Flora raised their family.

The farmhouse in Snape, Suffolk, where Peter was born

The Bailey family in 1934, with Peter second from the left

The small village of Snape has a rich history. It was listed in the Domesday Book in 1086. In more recent times the village is best known for its association with the composer Benjamin Britten, who lived there for ten years from 1937. Britten bought an old mill and converted it into an attractive residence with a large studio. Near the old mill was a collection of buildings, the Maltings, where barley was malted for the brewing of beer. When they fell into disuse Britten realised their potential and was instrumental in making the buildings into the venue for the Aldeburgh Music Festival. Today they house one of the finest concert halls in Europe.

Cecil and Flora had five children: Mary was the eldest, and then came the twins, Jack and Marjorie. George Peter Brett Bailey (known as Peter) was born in March 1922, followed by another brother, Craig. The children had a happy childhood with lively discussion and laughter when the family met around the table. Early schooling was supervised by a governess, but when he was ten years old Peter joined his older brother as a boarder at nearby Framlingham College. The College was founded as a memorial to Prince Albert, one of the most visionary and progressive educational thinkers of his time. His statue takes pride of place in front of the College.

The elegant buildings of Framlingham College, founded in 1864 as a memorial to Prince Albert

In the school holidays the children's father allotted tasks. Peter became familiar with farming, driving the tractor and working with the animals. One of the farm activities was the raising and releasing of game birds – pheasants and partridges. Beaters were needed to flush out the birds for the shooting parties; the Bailey children were persuaded to perform the task. Peter enjoyed working with the dogs that retrieved the shot birds.

From an early age Peter was fascinated with aeroplanes and flying. He made model aircraft, and after finishing his tasks on the farm would cycle to a nearby RAF airfield to watch the planes coming and going. They were biplanes called Gladiators, and were used as fighters. He was thrilled and in awe when one of the pilots, dressed in flying suit and boots, actually spoke to him! He had two relatives who were pilots, his mother's brother, Uncle Jack, and his father's brother-in-law, Uncle Harold. They were his heroes.

The Gloucester Gladiator was the first plane to capture Peter's attention and give him the aspiration to fly (image courtesy of www.dereock.co.uk)

At school Peter did well both academically and at sport. He played cricket, rugby and hockey for the school and was a member of the College's shooting eight. On Sunday he sang in the choir in chapel.

Peter left school in 1939, aged 17. His father's sister, Aunt Ada, had married Stanley Fownes-Rigden, a director of a prestigious company that produced high fashion gloves for the gentry. The company had offices in many parts of the world and Uncle Stanley promised Peter a rewarding position in the firm. In preparation Peter took an apprenticeship in London with an old-established textile company,

Hitchcock Williams. He lived with other apprentices in their building in St Paul's Churchyard, but it became a victim of the blitz. The building was completely destroyed – along with all of Peter's possessions. He, fortunately, escaped from the burning building unscathed.

Peter's father expected his son to follow him into the Army and was disappointed to learn that he wanted to join the Royal Air Force. One of Cecil's close friends who had been a pilot in World War I suggested to Peter that as soon as his 18th birthday milestone had been reached he apply to the RAF to become a pilot. "Now's your chance! If you succeed I will make sure your father and mother agree!" When Peter was accepted for training his parents not only consented – they were proud!

Peter went to RAF Kingstown, Carlisle, for his first flying experiences in a Magister, a two-seater monoplane designed for basic training. He was a "natural" and took readily to handling the aircraft. It was here that Peter made his first solo flight and learned aerobatics. He became familiar with instrument flying – essential when the horizon was obscured in bad weather!

Peter learned to fly and made his first solo flight in a Miles Magister
(image courtesy of www.dereock.co.uk)

Although Peter had ambitions to become a fighter pilot he was selected for advanced training as a flying instructor for aircraft with multi-engines. For this he had to go to North Battleford in Saskatchewan in central Canada, where, as part of the Empire Training Scheme, he would learn from RAF instructors all there was to know about flying. The course covered navigation, signalling and basic engineering as well as advanced training in the air in twin-engine aircraft.

One of Peter's fellow trainee pilots was Jimmy Edwards, the radio and television comedy actor, best known as Pa Glum in Take It From Here and as the headmaster "Professor" James Edwards in Whack-O! He played his trombone at every opportunity, and a talent for entertaining his fellow airmen ensured his future success in show business. Jimmy's career path in the RAF was remarkably similar to Peter's. He took part in D-Day Operation Tonga, but was shot down at Arnhem in 1944. This resulted in facial injuries requiring plastic surgery, later disguised with the huge handlebar moustache that became his trademark.

Peter and Jimmy passed their exams and were awarded their wings in 1942. Peter remained in Canada for a further year, working as an instructor in Nova Scotia. Taking advantage of being in Canada he took time to visit one of his heroes, Uncle Jack in Toronto.

LEFT Leading Aircraftsman Peter Bailey in 1941

RIGHT Proudly modelling his first flying suit

Wartime Adventures with Transport Command

Peter returned to England in 1943 and spent a few months gaining experience flying big, high-performance Wellington bombers before transfer to Transport Command, 233 Squadron. One of this Squadron's responsibilities was to deliver supplies to front line troops; skilful pilots were needed, with experience in taking off and landing in difficult
conditions and on short runways. It was here that Peter first flew the Dakota DC3 that was to become his favourite.

Stable, reliable and easy to handle, the Dakota DC3 was a gentleman's aircraft (image courtesy of www.dereock.co.uk)

Peter felt at home in the Dakota's cockpit

Transport Command played an essential part in ensuring the success of the D-Day assault. Operation Tonga – the seizing of two bridges near Caen – was considered critical to securing the Normandy landings, due to start a few hours later than Tonga. The two important bridges were Bénouville Bridge over the Orne Canal (later named Pegasus Bridge after the flying horse emblem worn by the British airborne forces) and Ranville Bridge, a road bridge about 400 metres to its east. The latter bridge was renamed Horsa Bridge to honour the glider airmen and aircraft involved in the operation.

It was thought that the Germans would have wired both bridges ready for demolition as soon as the landings were detected. An element of surprise was essential and a bold coup de main was planned – a small force landing close to the bridges and seizing them with incredible speed. Paratroopers were not suitable for such a role because they would land over a wide area and take too long to gather into a unified and potent force. The assault could only be carried out by glider planes transporting soldiers – delivering them together and ready for action from the moment they landed. The commandos' task was also to destroy other bridges to deny their se to the Germans, secure several villages and destroy an artillery battery that could possibly inflict heavy casualties on the Allied troops.

Peter was the pilot of one of six Dakota DC3 planes towing gliders across the Channel the night before D-Day. The big Horsa gliders, with a wingspan of 88 feet (nearly 27 metres), were constructed of wood and fabric and were towed on a 50-metre rope with a telephone line along it for communication between the two pilots. Each Horsa could carry 28 armed commandos.

In the D-Day Operation Tonga, Peter towed a Horsa glider

The pilots of the towing aircraft and the army's glider pilots trained intensively together. When the groups first met and introduced themselves Peter recognised a face he knew among the glider pilots. Brian Hebblethwaite was a Framlingham school friend!

"Have you got a towing pilot yet?" Peter asked him. When Brian replied, "No," Peter said, "Well, you have now!"

Towing the gliders was a skilled task, especially at take-off. Peter explains: "When it was your turn you had to be very careful to take up the slack or you would break the rope. Then you went full bore. You were halfway down the runway with the glider up in the air before you became airborne. The runways had to be extra long."

It was a tense and hazardous operation. "We didn't have fighter protection because it took place at night and we didn't have any armaments at all. The job we were doing was considered so dangerous that they issued us all with American flak suits, but they were cumbersome and uncomfortable to wear. So I used to fold mine up and sit on it because I figured if anything was going to get me, it would be coming from underneath. We were shot at from the ground on the way in and on the way out."

"Over the Channel we could see an armada of ships. As we approached the coast of Normandy I talked to my glider pilot Brian over the intercom to make sure his position was correct. It was full moon and the bridges, rivers and canals shone in the moonlight. I wished them luck and released them at about 2,500 feet. Then we had to get back. We couldn't turn around immediately and go straight back because of the mass of other aircraft coming in behind us, so we climbed to 6,000 feet and had a long trip around France back to the our base in the UK."

The DC3 pilots soon returned to support the commandos they had dropped off. "We loaded up and returned the following night to deliver supplies, mostly ammunition. We carried two soldiers whose role it was to dispatch the cargo with a parachute to break its fall. This time we didn't have the advantage of surprise, so we were shot at and badly damaged, but, happily, we didn't catch fire."

Peter saw two of the planes in his formation fall from the sky; another, piloted by Erroll Wood, was ablaze and veering north. On his return Peter filed a Missing in Action – Presumed Dead report on his mates. It was several months before 233 Squadron was notified that Flying Officer Wood and his crew had survived, although Peter was not informed. Erroll had managed to land his plane in the estuary of the Orne, unwittingly dodging German-laid mines as he did so. Although no-one was seriously injured in this crash-landing, the plane had come down in front of the German beach fortifications; the crew was quickly detained by a German patrol and spent the last year of the war as prisoners of war.

In September 1944 Peter took part in another operation towing Horsa gliders, and again his glider pilot was Brian Hebblethwaite. Market Garden was an operation to land troops and their supplies by glider and parachute at Arnhem to seize bridges across the Rhine. Hundreds of planes towing gliders streamed out of the United Kingdom towards the Dutch coast. It was not a successful venture. Of the 11,900 men who went to Arnhem only 3,900 escaped or were evacuated; over 1,400 men were killed, including Peter's friend Brian, and over 6,500 exhausted and wounded survivors were left behind to become prisoners of war. Peter's plane was again damaged, but didn't catch fire – the engines kept going.

Peter was left wondering at this display of human folly, but, undeterred, he and his crew made several more trips to resupply the ground forces, landing on makeshift airstrips. On the return trip they could accommodate sixteen casualties on stretchers, and a WAAF nurse on board tended to the needs of the wounded soldiers.

In recognition of his achievements at both Normandy and Arnhem, Peter was awarded an American Distinguished Flying Cross for "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight"

Transport Command was next required to provide support for troops in the Far East. Peter was in the advance party of six crews travelling by sea to Montreal in convoy with a Royal Navy escort. They were to take delivery of six new Dakota DC3s and fly them to Australia over the United States and the

Pacific Ocean. The ocean crossing was a challenge for an aircraft of limited range, so they had to wait for favourable weather. The journey took three weeks.

The crews were based in Camden near Sydney, from where they were to provide vital air support north of Australia in areas where there were no roads or railways. The Dakotas left fully laden to support the Allied offensives, up the Solomon Island chain, along the northern coast of New Guinea and to Borneo, with the Philippine Islands as the ultimate objective. More supplies – food and ammunition – were brought in by sea and flown to makeshift runways of steel landing mats, lit by flares for night landings, close to the front line troops. The climate and terrain made flying demanding – good visibility was essential. When planes could not land, supplies were dropped by parachute. In spite of the difficulties there were few mishaps.

A crew was usually away for three weeks and lived under canvas, so the trip back to the comfort of Sydney was welcome. While the plane was undergoing maintenance the crew "lived it up". Invited to a charity cocktail party at the Hotel Australia, Peter attended, dressed in uniform. He caught sight of an attractive young woman sitting with two chaperones (her mother and her aunt). He went over, introduced himself and, plucking up courage, asked her for her phone number.

"I'll give it to you," she said, "but you won't remember it!"

"Try me," replied Peter. He remembered it long enough to scribble it down on the back of a cigarette package. Her name was Shirley and she was a dental nurse. Next time he was back in Australia he rang the number and she answered the phone. They were married nine months later.

Shirley's parents gave her a splendid white wedding. Peter was supported by his friends who included his navigator – his best man – and his commanding officer. The commanding officer announced at the wedding that, instead of returning to the UK, Peter had been selected to go to RAF Headquarters in Melbourne to fly VIPs and Chiefs of Staff to various destinations in Australia and overseas. Two weeks after they married Peter and Shirley moved to Melbourne.

Peter had his own aircrew – co-pilot, navigator, radio operator and stewards – and also his own ground crew for airframe and engine maintenance. For two years the couple lived in Melbourne, and welcomed the birth of their son, Brett.

Newly wed – Peter and Shirley in 1946

The Berlin Airlift

At the end of the war defeated Germany was divided into four temporary occupation zones – the French, British, American and Soviet sectors. The Soviet sector produced much of Germany's food, whereas the other three relied on food imports, and had done so even before the war. Although Berlin was 160 km inside the Soviet occupation zone, the capital too was divided into four sectors.

The objective of the Marshall Plan was to use American economic support to rebuild war-devastated regions, modernise industry and make Europe affluent again. It was considered that "an orderly and prosperous Europe requires the economic contributions of a stable and productive Germany". This conflicted with Stalin's ambition to weaken Germany and bring it under Communist control within the Soviet Union. He thought he could slowly undermine the French and British in their occupation zones and that the United States would then withdraw.

The blockade of Berlin was triggered by the introduction of a new currency, the Deutsche Mark, by the Western Allies. The Soviet aim to force the Western powers to depend on supplies of food and fuel from the Soviet zone, giving them practical control over the entire city, was threatened by a revitalisation of the Germany economy and a fatal devaluation of the already hyper-inflated Reichsmark, used in East Germany. For the Soviets the new currency was the last straw.

The Allies had never negotiated an agreement to guarantee land-based rights of access to Berlin through the Soviet zone. However the Soviets had granted three air corridors to Berlin from Hamburg, Bückeburg and Frankfurt.

On 24th June 1948 the Soviets halted all road, rail and barge traffic in and out of Berlin, stopped supplying food and cut off the electricity generated from plants in the Soviet zone. West Berlin had just 36 days of food supplies and 45 days of coal. On a minimum daily ration of 1,990 calories it was calculated that the more than two million people in West Berlin would require daily 646 tons of flour and wheat, 125 tons of cereal, 64 tons of fat, 109 tons of meat and fish, 180 tons of dehydrated potatoes, 180 tons of sugar, 11 tons of coffee, 19 tons of powdered milk, 5 tons of milk, 3 tons of yeast, 144 tons of dehydrated vegetables, 38 tons of salt and 10 tons of cheese. In all, 1,534 tons of food and 3,475 tons of coal and gasoline were required each day to sustain West Berlin.

The bombardment of Berlin had caused immense devastation – most of the houses were damaged and conditions were dire for the remaining inhabitants. The winter months were particularly difficult, and an increase in deliveries of coal was vital.

When the airlift began there were two airfields in Berlin – Tempelhof with one runway in the American sector and Gatow with one runway in the British sector. Tempelhof 's runway was suitable only for small aircraft and fighters and it was surrounded by high apartment buildings that made landing difficult in bad weather. The Americans hastily built a second runway with a thick rubber base covered with steel landing mats, but it needed constant repair as it broke up under the continuous pounding of heavily loaded aircraft.

RAF Gatow played a key role in the airlift. Initially about 150 Dakotas and 40 Yorks were used to fly supplies. The airfield could also accommodate flying boats landing on a nearby lake, Greater Wannsee. The flying boats' speciality was transporting bulk salt.

The French very quickly built a new runway at Tegel – at the time the longest runway in Europe and completed in 90 days.

In July 1948 Major General "Tonnage" Tunner arrived to take over the operation. He had had significant experience in commanding and re-organising an airlift in China. Tunner's first visit to Berlin was on Friday 13th August and it was indeed a Black Friday. Cloud cover over Berlin dropped to the height of the buildings and heavy rain showers made radar visibility poor. A plane had crashed and burned at the end of the runway and a second one, landing behind it, burst its tyres while trying to avoid it. A third plane "ground looped" after the pilot mistakenly landed on a runway under construction. Aircraft were arriving every three minutes and were circling waiting for their turn to land. There was an extreme risk of mid-air collision. Planes were backed up on the ground. Although nobody was killed, the Control Tower was not in command of the situation.

As a result of Black Friday, Tunner instituted a number of new rules, adopting a conveyor belt approach that could be sped up or slowed down as situations demanded. Accident rates and delays dropped. By the end of August, after only one month, the Airlift was succeeding: the 1,500 flights a day delivered enough cargo to sustain West Berlin.

"My first trip was carrying food, lamps and a generator," Peter recalls. "We flew 24 hours a day, seven days a week – it was a challenge and a wonderful experience for a pilot. It was very demanding as our course and timing had to be exact. We had to maintain radio silence. We flew straight in and any plane that overshot the runway on landing had to return to base – it could not rejoin the 'ladder' – there was no second chance. Our main challenge was the weather, especially when it was foggy or snowing, but we flew using instruments and still kept up the convoy. The airways were congested; movements into Gatow increased to one a minute. We kept to the left of the narrow air corridors and flew at odd thousand feet altitudes on the way in and even on the way back."

Peter, with his co-pilot, navigator and wireless operator, flew two or three sometimes four – trips each day for a total of 250 missions. His base, RAF Lubeck, near Hamburg, was about 80 minutes flying time from Berlin. Unloading began as soon as their aircraft came to a standstill, and they stayed with the plane until joining the queue of aircraft waiting, nose to tail, for their turn to climb back into the air. The round trip took about three hours. The crew then took the next loaded and ready aircraft back to Berlin. Off duty they tried to catch some sleep in a billet, occupying any bed that happened to be vacant. Peter noted, "At the beginning things were chaotic around the airport, but the longer it lasted the better they became."

A*rriving in Berlin every minute, aircraft line up nose to tail for unloading*

Every three weeks a crew returned home for two or three days off while their plane was being serviced – it took a while to free the aircraft of coal dust. It was during one of his three-day respites that Peter's second child, Karen, was born.

The Cold War hostility between the Russians and the West was just one notch below open warfare. Peter recalled, "Russian MIG fighters would buzz us all the time in our narrow flight paths and pop mortar shells over the end of the runway when we were landing. They never hit anyone; they just made a nuisance."

By spring 1949 it became clear that the Soviet blockade of West Berlin had failed. It had not persuaded West Berliners to reject their allies in the West, nor had it prevented the creation of a unified West German state. Countermeasures imposed by the Allies on East German communications, an embargo placed on all strategic exports from the Eastern bloc and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), help to ensure the end of the blockade. It was lifted at one minute after midnight on 12th May 1949.

The Cold War May Get Hot

On return to England, now with a permanent commission, Peter resumed his duties as a flying instructor at RAF North Luffenham, Rutland. He was an examiner for instrument rating standards that included a practical test of the pilot wearing a masked helmet so he could not see the horizon. Advanced training included how to manage emergency situations such as – heaven forbid – losing an engine on take-off. For Peter and Shirley it was a pleasant interlude in the beautiful East Midland countryside. Peter played cricket and rugby and together they enjoyed the social life of the squadron. There were dances in the Officers' Mess and they went on camping holidays with the children.

In 1950 Peter was selected to be one of three pilots to go on exchange with the Royal Australian Air Force to the Richmond Airbase near Sydney, again to fly VIPs. It was an honour to be chosen – Peter's expertise as an instrument flying examiner and his world-wide flying experience were recognised. Peter was the flight commander and training officer, and in addition to taking his passengers to their various destinations, made sure that his Australian colleagues were equipped to carry their important passengers safely and smoothly. One flight carried the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, to London for a Commonwealth Conference. Peter and the crew used a Dakota, flying for five days in daylight hours with the nights in hotels along the way.

Peter enjoyed living in Australia and the experience made him resolve that, one day, it would be the country of his retirement.

The family, on board a ship bound for England, say farewell to Sydney

Back in London in 1953 Peter worked as a staff officer at the RAF Headquarters at the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. In order to advance his career he needed to gain experience in the administration and policy aspects of the organisation. He completed a three-month course on the protocols of the service, such as parade drill, how to run events, and "Service writing" requiring letters to be signed off: I have the honour, Sir, to be your obedient servant.

He worked in the Intelligence Branch gathering information about Allied and other air forces. He interviewed the attachés who monitored the air force activities of the country to which they were assigned. The Cold War was threatening to become "hot" as political and military tensions between NATO and the Soviet Union increased. The two superpowers armed heavily in preparation for an all-out, nuclear, World War III. It was important to be equipped with advanced aircraft and a strategy to deploy them should it be necessary.

In the 1950s the Canberra jet-powered light bomber came into service. The Canberra was faster and could fly at a higher altitude than piston-engine bombers and proved to be highly adaptable, serving in varied roles

including photographic reconnaissance. Peter, with his exceptional skills, was in one of the first groups of pilots to convert to flying jets, and the Canberra took over from the Dakota as his favourite aircraft. He found the plane a joy to handle, and came to appreciate its speed and manoeuvrability.

Flying the Canberra jet was exhilarating (image courtesy of www.dereock.co.uk)

In 1955 Peter was promoted to Squadron Leader and selected to work on photo and visual reconnaissance in Germany, in command of 80 Squadron. He and Shirley moved to München Gladbach (now Mönchengladbach), close to the Rhine near Dusseldorf. He discovered that photo-reconnaissance was a challenge that exercised all the skills he had acquired as a pilot over many years. His navigator, Robin Stubings, would locate the target and it was up to Peter to carefully place the aircraft to optimise the quality of the photographs. They found themselves flying in some unusual positions! The plane was equipped with sophisticated cameras capturing as many as sixteen exposures per second; the nose camera took photos ahead, another took vertical shots from the camera bay under the aircraft, and the obliques took pictures from the side.

For mapping and survey work Peter flew the Canberra at high altitudes, but for ground targets such as roads, railways or airfields they flew at low levels and high speed. Their work took them all over Europe and even included a six-week stay in Malta from where they surveyed the whole of Italy!

Brett and Karen were now at boarding school – Brett at his father's old school, Framlingham College, and Karen at a school in Northampton that ensured students learned how to be "ladies" as well as acquiring a well-rounded education. The children joined their parents in the school holidays for camping journeys through Western Europe as far as the Mediterranean.

Brett and Karen enjoying holidays near Venice

Peter was recalled to London in 1959 and spent two years as Staff Officer at the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall before being appointed officer commanding the RAF Metropolitan VIP Squadron at Northolt, in 1963. He was in charge of 20 fixed-wing aircraft of various types, four helicopters and the 30 crews who flew them.

It was a relief to have a break away from the threat of war and Peter and Shirley lived comfortably in the senior officers' married quarters at the airfield, with a batman to attend to their needs. The VIP passengers included very senior forces personnel from the rank of Air Marshal and its equivalent in other Forces, to members of the Royal family, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, senior civil servants and foreign VIPs as well. Peter had the honour of flying Her Majesty the Queen, Winston Churchill and Lord Louis Mountbatten – and they all thanked him. One memorable occasion in 1959 was flying with Sir Dermot Boyle, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, who was to present the prizes at Framlingham College.

Peter's experience with reconnaissance inspired him to try creative photography. He wanted to capture the many forms of transport available in London – including an aeroplane. Tower Bridge was to be the focus: it would be open with a boat coming through. Permission was obtained from both the Port of London Authority and Heathrow Airport for two planes to fly low over the centre of London. Precise flying was required of both Peter and his colleague in the aircraft that was to be in the picture. At the right moment Peter handed control to his co-pilot and took the photo with a hand-held camera.

In his next posting, as Wing Commander Operations at the NATO Headquarters in Rhinedahlen, Germany, Peter was in charge of the photo-reconnaissance activities of the NATO partners and the development of an operations strategy should a war break out. The Cold War was showing no signs of abatement and he shouldered heavy responsibilities – the work was challenging and demanding.

LEFT Wing Commander Peter Bailey, 1960

BELOW Peter's photograph of a Devon aircraft over Tower Bridge and the nearby Tower of London brings together air, water and road transport

A Time to Move On

Back in the United Kingdom at the beginning of 1967 Peter was posted to RAF Wyton in Huntingdonshire, home to the Strategic Reconnaissance Force. He was appointed Wing Commander Flying Operations, the senior Wing Commander at the station.

Soon after taking up the post Peter and the two children were at Heathrow Airport, waving to Shirley as she made her way across the tarmac to the waiting plane. She turned as she reached the plane, smiled and waved back. It was not an unusual event, for she revisited her homeland Australia every second or third year for several weeks, usually during the school term. When Peter received a letter from her saying she would not be returning he was flabbergasted, stunned – his first reaction was disbelief, for he had no suspicion that their twenty years of marriage were not as happy as he had imagined.

The family broke up soon after this picture was taken

At Wyton he had a big job to do organising the activities of the RAF reconnaissance squadrons. He continued photo-reconnaissance work and ran his squadrons efficiently, but his heart was not in it.

Although he was able to keep his personal problems from affecting his performance, Peter began to think about his situation and where his future lay; he had already discovered that with increasing engagement in administration – which was where his career path seemed to be leading – he would be flying less and less. The prospect of living in the officers' mess rather than married quarters did not appeal. He thought civilian life would lead to more involvement with his children, but, even more importantly, might persuade Shirley to come back to him.

Brett was determined to become an artist, but took Peter's advice to gain some experience of life first. He applied to join the army and was accepted. Peter had promised Karen that he would support her ambition to become a model.

His premature voluntary resignation from the air force after a year at Wyton was much to the regret of his senior officers, loath to lose the services of this highly proficient and reliable pilot. Peter's calm, unruffled demeanour had set such an inspiring example.

Peter bought a cottage in Suffolk and contemplated what he was going to do next. His children were by now established on their career paths and his roots to the land were calling him. He remembered the pheasants and partridges his father used to rear and decided to learn more about game birds. He went to the Game Conservancy Trust at Fordingbridge in Hampshire, where they developed game and wildlife management techniques. He wanted to find out how to farm game birds on a commercial scale and perhaps find a job managing a farm.

No such position came to hand, so he took a job running a show room for a company that manufactured portable sheds, garages, greenhouses and various home extensions, and arranging for the erection of the ones he had sold.

A skiing holiday in the Pyrenees attracted him. At the airport he bought a magazine to read on the plane. It was The Field, which specialised in huntin', shootin' and fishin'. An advertisement caught his attention: "Wanted – a manager to establish and run a game bird farm in South Africa". He had the background and training – he was ideally suited to the job – and soon found himself on his way to the Karoo in the Western Cape Province. He was to form a partnership and take responsibility for producing pheasants, partridges and guinea fowl destined for the upmarket restaurant and hotel trade. His partner, South African Dick Reid, would take care of the marketing aspects of the enterprise, taking orders and delivering the birds.

Matjiesfontein was flanked by mountains

The farm was 250 km north-east of Cape Town near the picturesque village of Matjiesfontein. Peter was to discover that Matjiesfontein, a "railway town" on the route connecting the diamond fields of Kimberley to Cape Town's port, had a colourful history. It dated from 1880 and owed its transformation from an insignificant, desolate place with a solitary shed to a fashionable tourist resort, to James Logan, a dynamic, unorthodox man originally from Scotland. He had been shipwrecked at Simonstown on the eastern side of Cape Peninsular with only a few pounds in his pocket, and walked to Cape Town. There he had found a job on the railways, and from being a penniless porter he was to become one of South Africa's wealthiest men.

Logan purchased land at Matjiesfontein and, aware that travellers required sustenance on interminable journeys to the interior, he catered for their needs. He searched the area for groundwater and soon had more than enough to supply the 250,000 litres of water that each locomotive consumed on its way to the next supply. He used more water to create an oasis, developing gardens and planting trees. Cherry, pear and peach orchards flourished and the fruit was taken for sale in the Kimberleys and in Cape Town. Logan imported materials and skilled stone masons from Scotland and, in a Victorian style, built cottages and the famous hotel, the Lord Milner, named after the High Commissioner for South Africa at the time.

Logan had a nagging asthmatic cough that was cured in the Karoo climate, and on the strength of his advertising its "clear, bright air" the village became a popular health and holiday resort. It attained quite extraordinary fame, renowned far beyond South Africa. Aristocrats from Britain and the Continent came to the village to convalesce from a variety of real and imagined ailments. Visitors included Lord Randolph Churchill, Edgar Wallace and General Haig. The South African novelist, Olive Schreiner, lived there for a while.

James Logan died in 1920 and his grandson, Major John Buist, inherited the Logan estate that included the village and many properties. The village went quietly into decline until David Rawdon bought it in 1968. Rawdon, like Logan, knew how to spot an opportunity. An enterprising hotelier with a flair for interior decoration, he restored the Victorian buildings with great care. When Peter arrived in 1971 Matjiesfontein was again offering high-class hospitality and attracting an eclectic mix of visitors. David also owned sumptuous boutique hotels in the Cape and Natal. Peter and David were to become good friends.

John Buist owned the farm that Dick and Peter leased for the game bird farming enterprise. It was in semi-desert scrub country in an attractive valley, about eight kilometres from the village, with a backdrop of craggy mountains. The railway went through the property and a long straight road met the horizon. There was plenty of ground water, pumped to the surface by a windmill, and well-grown trees provided welcome shade around the homestead where Peter lived. The scrub was ideal for grazing sheep – sheep raised on it developed a fine flavour – so they sub-let most of the 1,000 hectares to a neighbouring Afrikaner sheep farmer, retaining the house and farm buildings for their game farm purposes.

TOP Groundwater was plentiful
ABOVE The comfortable farmhouse was shaded by trees

Peter had to seek a permit to import the initial eggs from England, set up incubators and brooders and erect a netted enclosure that covered over a hectare. He needed help, so employed Simon and his wife, Elsie, and Jackson, descendants of the original native people of the area, and well recommended by David Rawdon. They soon picked up game bird farming, and were speaking English with an ultra-English accent in no time at all.

After helping to build and erect the wire cages their work consisted mainly of feeding and watering the birds. The climate was very hot and dry during the summer months and icy cold at night in the winter, so great care was needed. For six months of the year Peter was fully occupied with hatching the eggs in the incubator and brooding the chicks. For the first three to four weeks the delicate chicks needed to be kept warm. Then they could be released into the open wire cages, with the feathers on one wing clipped so they could not fly out. When six months old they were fully grown.

LEFT Peter bred pheasants for the up-market restaurant and hotel trade
RIGHT Big black eagles lived in the mountains (image courtesy of Dr Rob Davies)

It took Peter two years to establish the business. With hard work and virtually no competition, it became the largest producer of game birds in South Africa, supplying two to three thousand birds each season. The birds were killed and gutted but not plucked – game birds need to be hung with their feathers on before they are prepared for cooking.

Peter protected his birds from the nocturnal civets – large cats; he trapped them. There were a few springbok in the hills on the property, also home to a black eagle with a 2-metre wingspan, and two pairs of ostriches.

It rarely rained, but when it did it poured. Peter could hear the usually dry river filling up and cascading down the valley. The xerophytic vegetation took full advantage of it and burst, almost overnight, into bloom. The brown scrub blazed with spectacular colour.

Lord Milner Hotel was named after the High Commissioner for South Africa in 1897

At weekends Peter socialised with the guests in the Lord Milner Hotel. Here he met Dr Christiaan Barnard, who performed the first successful human heart transplant. The son of a missionary, he was born in Beaufort West further into the wilderness of the Cape Province than Matjiesfontein. He became interested in the development of a heart-lung machine and spent many years experimenting with heart transplantation in animals. In 1967 he shocked the world by removing a patient's dying heart and replacing it with a healthy one from an accident victim. He achieved instant fame and enjoyed the applause and being in the limelight. He was controversial – his decision to choose as the first heart donor a brain-dead accident victim was criticised in the United States, and he was not popular with his white fellow countrymen. Allowing mixed-race nurses in the operating room to treat white patients and transplanting the heart of a white woman into a black man appalled those who were strongly in favour of apartheid.

Dr Christiaan Barnard was a frequent visitor to Matjiesfontein

Barnard came to Matjiesfontein to “get away from the rat race”, and Peter, enjoying his company and ready wit, invited him to the farm. Like Peter he was an excellent shot and on several occasions they took their guns into the hills to look for springbok. Peter released a few pheasants (wing feathers intact) with the idea that one day he might augment his income by organising “shoots”. His handsome pointer dog, keen of nose and eye, could spot animals miles away. Dash would stand in the point position with one paw raised for an incredibly long time!

LEFT Dash the pointer was always on the lookout for springbok in the hills

After four years of successfully managing the farm it was increasingly apparent that Peter’s partner Dick Reid, who lived in Cape Town, was not living up to his part of their agreement, making excuses as to why he was not getting orders. Peter was forced to undertake the marketing role himself, ringing up established customers, seeking new ones, and delivering the birds. Peter drove for miles and days across South Africa and came to know it well and appreciate its diversity. But it was a strain to do the work of two people!

When David Rawdon came to hear about the situation he was incensed and offered to assist Peter. He recommended a helpful lawyer. Peter successfully sued his partner in the High Court of South Africa, recovered his money and left with regret, but also with many very pleasant memories. Simon, Elsie and Jackson wept when he said his farewells.

During the 1970s there was high unemployment in the United Kingdom, particularly among school leavers. The government created the Manpower Services Commission to coordinate employment and training services, and in Gloucestershire the Commission set up Youthforce to arrange work experience and apprenticeships. Young people who came into the scheme were generally straight from secondary modern schools, which offered education in the less academic subjects. They were not well equipped to gain employment – some came from disadvantaged backgrounds and others had difficult behaviour problems.

Peter, back in England, purchased a residence in the elegant town ofCheltenham, and found a job with Youthforce in Gloucester. Initially employed as a work experience coordinator he was soon promoted to coordinator of the scheme, his experience in the air force invaluable when dealing with the trainees and their problems. Deeply concerned for their wellbeing he was able to exercise discipline when appropriate.

A staff of ten taught basics such as carpentry and building skills or supervised the trainees in their work places. Much of Peter's work was persuading local businesses and organisations to accept the trainees and provide them with appropriate instruction. He had a close relationship with the Gloucester Shire Council, which offered many and varied placements. Each year he saw about a hundred youths needing guidance if they were not to be forever on the dole. They would line up each Friday for "Pay Parade" to receive a modest allowance from the scheme, as they were not paid by businesses. Unsatisfactory behaviour meant reduced pay. Peter found this an effective way of exercising discipline – it hurt! Those who didn't turn up or were late for work, the disobedient and those who showed disrespect to their employers were quickly persuaded to toe the line.

The aim was that trainees should find permanent employment after one year on the course. Up to a third remained with the organisation of their placement, some of them finding a vocation. One girl flourished when she became a nurse's aide in a large nursing home – she discovered she had a talent for caring; another success was the boy who took naturally to gardening and became absorbed by the challenge of persuading plants to grow. Others were less successful – some were intractable and destined to remain on the dole.

233 Squadron held a reunion each year to celebrate their success and to remember their colleagues who fell in Normandy and Arnhem. Peter and his co-pilot, wireless operator and navigator pose in front of a Dakota DC3

Peter spent eight years with Youthforce and was greatly respected for his sound judgement. He was a pioneer and his advice was sought by similar schemes. In 1986 the scheme closed and Peter reached retirement age. He was able to fulfil his long-time ambition to spend the remainder of his life based in Australia.

Peter's son Brett, Australian-born, was now living there permanently – he had achieved his ambition to become a professional artist and his landscapes were in demand. He was able to sponsor Peter and make his emigration straightforward.

Peter enjoying his social life

Happy Ever Aftering

Framlingham College, where Peter and his son Brett went to school, had on several occasions been an influence on their lives. Martin Irving, the son of the Vicar of Snape – the village where Peter was born – had briefly been Peter's co-pilot during the war, and afterwards, as a schoolmaster at Framlingham, taught Brett French.

In the same school House and year as Peter was Peter Simpson, who became a naval officer. Peter and his wife Hetta were living in a waterfront house in Clontarf, Sydney when Peter arrived in Australia in 1987 to take up his retirement. Off on a two-month trip overseas they asked Peter to look after the house while they were away. He used the time to adjust to his new life and to buy himself a motorhome, intending to explore the country at leisure in search of a place to put down roots.

The Clontarf house belonged to a woman who was living on a farm at Eumundi on Queensland's Sunshine Coast; Peter went on his way armed with her phone number in case he should find himself in the area. He travelled slowly northwards along the coast as far as Maryborough, at which point he decided he had gone far enough towards the tropics. He returned to Noosa, a town that had caught his attention. It seemed like an ideal place to live, with beautiful beaches, an interesting, pristine river and a warm, sunny climate. It gave the impression that its unique environment was appreciated and protected. He was captivated; he found a house that he liked and bought it.

Looking at a map of the Sunshine Coast Peter noticed the name Eumundi. A phone call led to an invitation to go and meet the woman from Clontarf – Joy Mason, who with her husband, Jim, an engineer, had retired to the Sunshine Coast on an avocado orchard. A manager ran the farm for them and they enjoyed a pleasant life. Peter appreciated their company and they became good friends. He helped on the farm as needed, for Jim was not well. Over the next two years Jim's health deteriorated. "Take care of Joy for me when I'm not here to do it," he asked Peter just before he passed away.

Joy sold the farm, accepting Peter's advice to ensure the deal she made was to her advantage, and moved to the coast – to Noosa, not far from Peter.

Peter settled quickly into his new community and its activities. He played a major role with the Red Cross in Noosa, becoming the Sunshine Coast Disaster Officer for several years. He was responsible for training members on how to cope in the event of serious flooding, bushfire, cyclone or other calamity. Using his service background he organised exercises to help them prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. He often met Joy when he was working with the Red Cross for she, too, was an active supporter.

Joy was also one of the group of friends who regularly played tennis and golf. Spending more and more time in each other's company, Peter and Joy found companionship and happiness in their relationship.

It was Joy who realised it did not make sense to have two houses when one would suffice. "This is ridiculous," she said as Peter was leaving one evening to go home. "Let's both sell up and buy another house together – we could pool our resources and spend less time travelling to see each other!"

"Excellent idea," Peter approved. He went to the estate agent the very next day.

They were married in 1997 at the house in Clontarf, now the home of Joy's daughter, and where Peter had begun his new life in Australia. Members of both their families were present – all delighted that Peter and Joy had found love and contentment.

Peter and Joy married in 1997; Peter's children, Karen and Brett, were delighted by the union

Continuing their active lives in Noosa Joy was very involved with Lifeline and Peter with Legacy. He also joined Probis and became President during 2000. At the nursing home in Tewantin he was well known as bingo caller!

With family and friends to visit in many parts of the world they travelled extensively. Between them Peter and Joy had three children and nine grandchildren, including a banker, a psychologist, a journalist and an anaesthetist, scattered across the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada, the United States and New Zealand. Peter showed Joy the village of Snape in Suffolk. He took her to the Crown for lunch and was amazed when he was recognised.

“Well, if it isn’t Master Peter,” said an elderly gentleman sitting in the corner. It was Harry, who been Peter’s father’s “Horseman”, in charge of the two Suffolk Punches used for ploughing.

They attended reunion dinners at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, and visited several of Peter’s Air Force colleagues, including Robin Stubings who had been his navigator when he was flying Canberras in Germany. Robin and his wife lived in Andover in Hampshire and together they reminisced, recalling other friends in 80 Squadron.

A happy life in Noosa continued. Peter was now 82 years old and Joy was 77. Not quite ready for a radical change, but aware that they might need support in the future, they followed in the steps of friends and moved to a retirement village promising “resort style living for the un-retiring”, at Twin Waters. They moved into a delightful villa with magnificent park and waterfront views just before Christmas 2004.

A home together at Twin Waters

Together Peter and Joy enjoyed the many activities in the village and kept up with golf and tennis. Joy was diagnosed with the onset of Alzheimer’s disease in 2008 and slowly deteriorated, Peter looking

after her until she needed to move into a nursing home in 2011. Joy passed away later that year, and was sorely missed.

Peter was reminded of his air force past when he received a message that Brian Hebblethwaithe wanted to contact him. Mystified, Peter called the number in England; the man on the phone sounded exactly like Brian.

“But you’re dead,” said Peter. “You were killed in Arnhem.”

“I’m his son,” replied Brian. “My mother was pregnant when father was killed, but he didn’t know. She called me Brian in his memory. I want to find out more about what happened to my father.” Peter obliged, also recalling the companionship and trust he and his friend had shared.

Peter was more than pleasantly surprised to receive a phone call from a naval commander, Dario Tomat, who was researching the circumstances of the downing of his father-in-law’s aircraft during the D-Day offensive. This father-in-law was Flight Lieutenant Erroll Wood. Peter had always understood that Erroll had perished, reporting him missing in action after seeing his plane ablaze, so a happy reunion to celebrate the miracle of his survival was inevitable.

Erroll had migrated to Australia in 1950, worked for Tasmania’s Hydro Electric Commission and played an active role in Hobart’s Air Force Cadet Unit. At the RAAF Club in Hobart, Peter and Erroll met once more. Lieutenant Daryl Peebles, RANR, who photographed the reunion, wrote: “It was over 64 years ago that a cheery ‘thumbs-up’ was exchanged between these two fine young airmen as they took off toward Normandy. Their greeting at their reunion was just as exciting, their friendship was just as strong and their spirit just as willing as it was when they were mere lads in their early 20s so many years ago.”

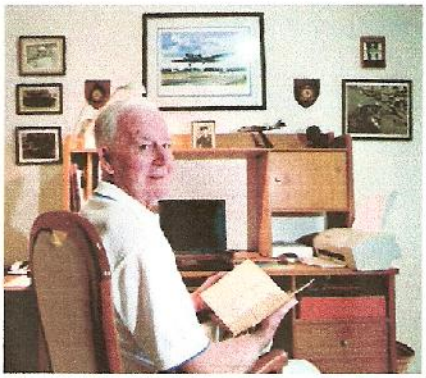
In 2012 Peter went to England to celebrate his 90th birthday with his family and to attend a reunion of 80 Squadron, holding its annual dinner at the RAF Club. Pilots and navigators and their wives, honoured to have such an inspiring pilot in their midst, congratulated Peter on his achieving this significant milestone. They wished him many more happy years to come.

Peter and Erroll Wood meet again after 64 years (image courtesy Lieutenant Daryl Peebles RANR)

Here is a picture of Jenifer and Peter holding the book.

The following is taken from the 10th anniversary edition of the Twin Waters Coastal Living Magazine in 2006 and gives a nice view of Peter's amazing study.

Wing Commander touches down



FLYING HIGH: Peter Bailey's study has a wealth of memorabilia from his time as Wing Commander in the RAF

From flying VIPs such as Queen Elizabeth and Winston Churchill to enjoying a VIP lifestyle at Living Choice Twin Waters, Peter Bailey has had a full and varied life.

An excellent sportsman and gifted academic, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1940 and held the rank of Wing Commander before retiring from the RAF in 1970.

Peter's study has a fascinating collection of memorabilia from his RAF days, including a wonderful photo of Queen Elizabeth II as she smilingly waved to Peter after she had visited his squadron in Germany. Other dignitaries he flew included Earl Mountbatten, Winston Churchill, F M Montgomery and Prime Minister Robert Menzies.

Peter's flying logbooks reveal entries that would make history teachers drool - he participated in the Normandy (D Day), Arnhem, Philippines and Borneo operations, was involved in the Berlin Airlift and commanded the VIP and Reconnaissance Squadron.

Following his service career he emigrated to South Africa where he ran a game farm until 1978. He then returned to the UK to direct a Government Youth Training Scheme before moving to Australia in 1986.

Peter and his wife Joyce moved from Noosa Waters to Twin Waters Retirement Village in December 2004 where their lives are anything but retiring. They play tennis and golf and enjoy taking part in activities at the leisure centre at Living Choice, Twin Waters.