

F111 Project 1966.

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It was around November 1965, I was a WO Radtech at the time, when rumours started going around Headquarters Support Command (HQSC) in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, that the RAAF was going to buy the F111 aircraft and some Aircraft Technicians would be going to Fort Worth on the Spares Assessing Team. As this was a new aircraft, the last thing that anyone expected was that any “**Groundies**” would be included. Then early in February 1966, I was called into the Section Leader’s office and told that I may need to consider my plans in the future because, even though I was a RADTECHG, I was going to be recommended to accompany the team to assess the requirements for Electronic Test Equipment and the associated Calibration Equipment. Later in the month I was advised that this would now happen and I would be leaving for Fort Worth at the beginning of May, 1966.



From then on it became a rush to get passports and visas and we all had medical examinations and our vaccinations were updated. We received an allowance to buy extra civilian clothes, such as new suits, to make sure we were presentable “Aussies”. Then we got the really good news in regard to the allowance we would receive while overseas. At that time a WOFF’s pay was about \$AU60.00 a week or about \$AU8.50 per day but we were all going to get an extra \$US22.00 per day tax free.

The Commissioned Officers had departed some time before us to get things organised for our arrival. Finally the big day came for the “other ranks” and all the Airmen were picked up from their home or quarters and taken to Essendon Airport for departure. Overseas travel was not like today as it was far more relaxed in the areas of passport control and security. Nevertheless we were all somewhat apprehensive about our first overseas flight. Once on board it was into the free drinks to get settled down for the first leg of the flight to Nandi in Fiji. It was on this section of the flight that I asked if I could go to see the cockpit and the hostess promptly took me there. I jokingly told the pilot to put his hands up or I would shoot him with my camera to which he responded by immediately raising his hands. Try doing that on flight these days.



From Nandi it was on to Honolulu and through customs onto American soil. We were not there very long before it was time to reboard the aircraft and head for San Francisco where we had an overnight stop.

We were quartered in a Motel about halfway between the City and the airport and had arrived early in the day so we all decided that it was time to experience some of the nightlife of San Francisco and down on the infamous Fisherman’s Wharf we went.

Next morning we flew to Dallas where we were met by a fleet of hire cars driven by the Officers and the Corporal Clerk who were already settled in at Fort Worth. On the way to our motel in Fort Worth we were taken past the building from which JFK was shot and we were given some vivid descriptions of the event by our Sqn Ldr driver. We soon settled into our Motel on Camp Bowie Blvd all in twin share rooms. My roommate was Sgt “Beasty” Betteins, a RADTECHA. All our meals were provided by the Motel which also had a nice little bar. The ‘Texas Belle’ behind the bar gave us our first Texas language lesson when she informed us that “**that smarts!**” really meant “**that hurts!**”. Accommodation and meals cost us about \$US6.00 per day per person. We shocked the Yanks with the amount of their low alcohol beer that Aussies could drink. We used to pile the cans up in stacks between 3 and 4 feet high in the middle of the bar.

We were taken to the bank to open cheque accounts so our pay could be deposited directly into the bank and, for doing so, we each received a Silver Dollar coin from the bank. In the middle of this process it decided to rain Texas style with six inches in a very short time. For some reason the bank promptly shut its doors and put armed Security Guards on each door and we were locked in until the deluge finished.

The following day we were picked up by a RAAF hired car and taken to the General Dynamics factory at [Carswell AFB](#) on the edge of Fort Worth. Here we met all the Officers and other



Texas staff like our gorgeous secretaries. (That’s Charlotte in the middle – see later) We were allocated our positions in the working area which was a long room with the Officers and Other Ranks intermingled. After this we went to meet with the RAF contingent that was also over there to access F111’s for the RAF. We were rather shocked at the poor state of their “Blues” uniforms compared to ours and some of them were so ashamed they had bought and wore American Air Force “Drabs” with RAF insignias.

Unfortunately the RAF pulled out of the purchase after a few months.

The first week was taken up with an orientation course on the new features of the F111 including the Terrain Following Radar and triple redundancy controls. At the conclusion of the course, General Dynamics presented each of us with a “Diploma F111 Staff/Management” (it was the shortest time I had ever spent getting a Diploma) and a small model of the F111 aircraft itself.

A few nights later, General Dynamics organised a welcome dinner for the “Other Ranks” from both the RAF and RAAF. This dinner required the CMC from each country to respond to the Manager’s welcome speech. Protocol demanded that the RAF WOFF spoke first and I created quite a deal of laughter by referring to his speech as “*the speech from the honourable leader of the opposition*” when delivering my response. There was some rivalry between the two WOFF’s as the “Poms” had permitted him to become a member of the Officers Mess as per USAF protocol but I was only allowed to be a member of the Sergeants Mess as per RAAF protocol. However, I was still permitted to attend the Officers Mess but not as a member. This I did on a

number of occasions as I had made friends with several USAF Officers. Also, if I went to other USAF bases I was treated as an Officer with full Officers Mess privileges. The Australians responded to the hospitality we received in good old Aussie tradition by putting on a BBQ (below) and inviting many of the General Dynamics personnel along to see how we do things in Australia.

For some reason that I forget now, Australian WOFF's did not wear a coat of arms on their Drab sleeves at that time, only the golden crown and eagle on the shoulder. This gave me an advantage over the Pommy WOFF as it meant in a US Mess a lot of Officers thought I was a full Colonel and treated me like one although it was hard to get used



to saluting especially without wearing a hat. Later, when I returned to Oz, I was posted to Amberley Base Radio and one day this USAF Lt Colonel (his eagles were only bronze) wandered in and asked at the front desk for the Officer in charge. He was pointed to my office and all eyes of the airmen were on him wondering why he was there. To their absolute amazement when he entered the office he stood at attention and saluted me – they were all totally abashed when, while I was still seated at the desk, I simply returned his salute American style with hand horizontal and no hat. He sat and related what he wanted and I organised it then the process was repeated when he left. You have no idea the consternation this caused among the “Other Ranks”.



We soon settled in to our work and the Texas way of life. It did take a few weeks to come to terms with visiting supermarkets with six-shooters available over the counter. This was reinforced in restaurants and cafes where there was a sort of hat stand at the doorway with a sign on it saying “*Please leave your guns here*” and they were being serious. My Texas friends wore them and, as shown in the picture, they convinced me to do the same, albeit in fun. There were other activities that we simply had to do such as go to the Texas annual “*State Fair*” just south of Dallas. Of course going to a Rodeo was almost mandatory and one simply had to go to the Disney like attraction “*Six Flags over Texas*”. You also got used to hearing good old genuine “*Hill Billy Country and Western*” music everywhere and I even saw this up and coming but slightly overly well developed young singer called “*Dolly*” something in Dallas with my Texas friends (and what a lovely “*Dolly*” she was).



You soon learnt when ordering Steaks in a “*Steak House*” that, apart from being extremely large, rare meant two seconds each side on a hot plate. Even medium well could have blood still pouring out of it while you are eating. One restaurant in particular was so Texan that the wall was lined with the ends of Neck Ties and a notice at the door stated that all Neck Ties would be cut off if worn inside. They also introduced us to Line Dancing where you seemed to do nothing but repeatedly prance forward six paces and cry out at the top of your voice “**Bullshit!**” then four paces back and repeat the call.

The Texas language was another problem and, as one of our Sqn Ldrs explained; if you needed to rub out some pencil writing then you did not ask the Secretary for a “Rubber” as we would back in Oz. Over here it was an “Eraser” and a “Rubber” meant something else entirely. Also, if you were told by somebody “*Y’all come see me some time*” it was not an invitation to visit unless they gave a firm date and time. In most shops you would be greeted by “*Howdy! Howdy!*” on entry and as you left the shop were told “*Y’all comeback sometime*



Y’hear!” I also found out the difference (or is that similarity?) in our humour when I wanted to post a local letter and asked our secretary, Charlotte (pictured earlier above), whether it cost four or five cents – her response was to look up, smiling quite innocently, and in her Texas drawl said “**A Nickel!**” We had only been there a few days and had not become completely familiar with Nickels and Dimes after all we had only just changed to Dollars and Cents in Oz ourselves (who can forget February 1966). About 8 years later I went back to Fort Worth and managed to find her and reminded her about her response and she said they used to love taking the “Mickey” out of us that way.

We were also warned by the Texans about the “Colour” problems and to stay out of certain areas. However, we did not find any problems as we still had sufficient Australian accent that they knew we were not from the “Deep South”. We did notice in



the local newspapers that if they did something to a white person it was front page, if it was white to white then perhaps page 3, if it was white to one of them then it was back page and if they did something to each other then it probably would not be published at all. We also remarked that in the Fort Worth newspapers it was 90% Fort Worth news, 9% Texas, 0.9% the rest of USA and 0.1% the rest of the world so we did not get much news from home.

Even though we were relatively comfortable in the Motel, we found it was much cheaper to rent an apartment and began looking around. Someone found a group of apartments at 5225 Camp Bowie Blvd – ours was the one on the upper floor nearest the Freeway, and they had plenty of vacancies so a whole group of us moved there. Like at the Motel we shared apartments in the same pairs. This gave us a lot more living room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom with other facilities in the complex, including a swimming pool and “Pool Parties” with the other tenants. Transport to and from Carswell AFB was by



a number of RAAF hired cars driven by one of the NCOs' at each of the apartments complexes. The new location was also adjacent to the Highway 30 freeway which made it very easy to get to and from work without getting lost. While we were only a short distance from the local supermarket we found that it was better to stock up at the "PX" Store on Carswell AFB as the food was at least 10% cheaper. This was evidenced by the service personnel or their wives that came shopping there when they often had three or more trolleys all filled to overflowing.

Close to the end of June we became aware of a bus trip to Monterrey, Mexico being organised by Carswell AFB for the July 4 weekend. They were short of numbers and welcomed RAAF guys with open arms. To make it even better it was being subsidised by the USAF and the cost was minimal. On the Saturday morning we set off complete with tour guide and headed for Laredo. Here it was bedlam as half of Texas was going south for the weekend. However, we managed to avoid the crush after one of the Mexicans Border Guards came along and mentioned that if he found about \$US20.00 next to the bus we would be processed quicker - so we quickly took up a collection and dropped it out the window and soon went on our merry way.

A "Coffee Break" was the next stop at the Mexican town of Sabinas Hidalgo where we got our first taste of real "hot" Mexican food. Then it was on to Monterrey and two days of touring and nights in the bar. While most places accepted US dollars we later worked out that the exchange rate used was considerably different to what it would have been if we had changed our money to Peso's before leaving the US. The tourist bits we visited included a horse riding farm where we could ride one of the horses for about \$US1.00 and we would be held on by a Mexican Tourist Guide. Once you were mounted the sales pitch started for a tip and you could not get off until you had given him several dollars. The return trip was uneventful and getting through US customs was certainly less expensive than the other way.



A group of us had a hire car which we used to get around Fort Worth and to go on visits to many Texas towns like Austin, Houston and "The Alamo" or over the border into Ardmore and Durant, Oklahoma. (Click pic at left). This gave us a very good insight to Texan history and culture. We also managed a long weekend trip to New Orleans, Louisiana (pronounced "*Looosyaanna*" by Texans). We left on the Friday after work and went down via Dallas and Shreveport. This took us past a lot of the crocodile swamps but I don't recall seeing any crocodiles. It had its humorous side especially on the first night – I had remained in the motel after dinner as I had driven down most of the

night and was very tired. Very much later in the night I awoke only to find my legs rather paralysed. When I turned on the light to find out what was wrong with them I found I had one of the Sergeants fast asleep across my legs. With the help of the others we got him back to his right room and safely in bed to sleep it off. We did manage a lot of sight seeing



including the lengthy bridge that crosses Lake Pontchartrain and, of course, the French Quarter. The return trip took us on the seaside route via Lafayette and Houston.

Working days kept us busy learning all about these new large electronic “Test Stations” (about \$US100,000 each) which had started to computerise electronic testing and the new equipment like “*Ground Following Radar*” which was a special feature of the F111. This gave us an introduction to test equipment and early computing principles that told you more what the problem was and which parts to replace to fix it thus eliminating a lot of guess work on the part of the Technicians. The knowledge gained here proved to be very useful for the rest of my working career especially when I moved into computer programming and interfacing. Then there was the correspondence with all the companies offering alternative test equipment and the associated calibration equipment in order to find the most appropriate equipment. The quality and accuracy of these items seemed to be advancing almost every day. The Airframe Fitters also were able to go onto the production line and see exactly how the aircraft were being built from a small pile of nuts and bolts at one end of the assembly line right through to the completed aircraft at the other end. Of course there was still the problem of the aircraft wings falling off every so often but we were assured they were working on this.

Nights were never dull as most nights there was either an outing arranged or you started to socialize with some of the local and international organisations like church groups etc. This brought you in much closer contact with the Texans and you often made friends for life. I still maintain contact with the wife and family of a very dear friend I met over there and we have often visited each other over the years until he passed away a few years ago. (This picture was taken on a return trip years later – pick the Texans)

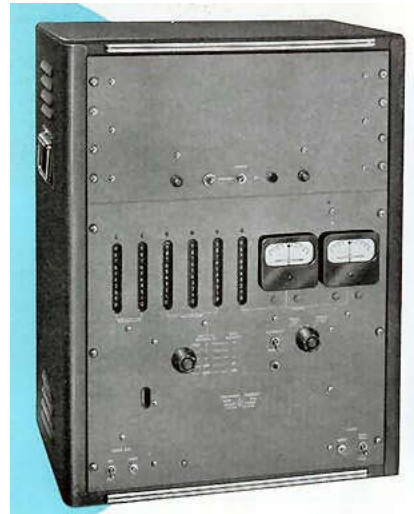


Around July/August, another RAAF procurement team came to Los Angeles to provide spares assessment for the new Orion Aircraft. I was sent across to them for a week or so to try to establish some uniformity on the electronic test equipment used by both projects. On arrival I was met and taken to my accommodation in the same apartments as the others. Why I remember this so well was that, as Australians, they somehow managed to get their grog duty free and they had lined up several dozen bottles of various liqueurs along a shelf. Of course we had to taste it all didn't we? The first morning at the office there was a bit of a shock. When I got to the office with the others I sat discussing our work plans with them and about half an hour later the OC came in and gave me a blast. Even though I had spent the previous night with these guys, I was supposed to have waited until I had been interviewed by him before talking work with the blokes. Later in this visit they took me down to see the “Sunset Strip” and a few of the local attractions but, only from outside as we had been warned to stay away from them for fear of ‘carnal flu’.

Early in September it was off to Hewlett Packard (HP) in Palo Alto just outside of San Francisco. HP provided me with a hire car for the time I was there and I picked it up from the airport and drove down to the Motel that HP had booked and paid for my room for the week plus a \$US15.00 day incidentals allowance for petrol and meals etc. I think I got this good treatment as

the General Manager of HP Australia (John Warmington) had advised them of my work with him in Melbourne and possibly of how much we would likely to be spending with them. The week was spent looking at demonstrations of new electronic technology, lunching with senior management (unfortunately not with David Packard though but I did make it to his office to see him) and dining out at night with the sales team.

I also got to work with many of the scientists who worked both on the original 524(a, b and c) and 5245L Electronic Counters, 606, 608D, 612, 614 series of Signal Generators and the all important “Travelling Clock” Caesium Beam frequency standard.



On the day I was due to fly back to Dallas, the flight did not leave until late that night so I decided to drive into San Francisco. Sure it was an easy route, straight down the Highway 101 and into the city except for one small problem – when approaching the city I was in the extreme left lane near the oncoming traffic when I saw the sign “San Francisco next right”. Now being an Aussie in the middle lane then I must be in the “Right” hand lane and ready to turn off especially as I could see San Francisco on my “Right” over the other side of the oncoming traffic. Next thing I knew I was going on to the San Francisco – Oakland Bridge crossing the water to Oakland. With nowhere to turn around and still with plenty of time to spare I went across to Oakland and then followed the Highway 580 around the top of the bay and came back south across the Golden Gate bridge and went straight down to the airport to await my flight back to Dallas.

The flight was one to remember as there were only two of us in the 1st Class area (privilege of WOFF’s and above in those days) we were well fed and watered on our 3 hour trip. The hostess kept coming out with a bottle of French Champagne and insisting we partake. Well she didn’t really have to twist our arms very much. The only problem was after our arrival back at Dallas when I was picked up by a cab to go to Fort Worth. For some reason the Freeway seemed to be rather circular as the cab was rolling around as though we were on a corkscrew. Still apart from a headache the next morning I had no other injuries.

At the end of September, Sgt’s Max Heynatz and Brian McGrath and I started off on a trip to Rochester NY to the electronic division of General Dynamics to see how their equipment was manufactured. I got approval to leave on the Friday so I could visit some of my wife’s relations in Lowellville, Ohio where I not only encountered Czech culture but they took me into the Amish country just across the Pennsylvania border. Judging by the look on this Amish farmer’s face, he did not appreciate his picture being taken as it was against his religion.



Because my flight was not the one booked by the Embassy I was taken to the airport by a Texas friend. On arrival at the airport there were

several “coloured” people in little bays at the entry to the terminal. My friend told me that I could book my luggage in with them rather than lug it upstairs as I had done on previous trips. So I took my case over to one of them and he accepted it and put it on the scales then stuck the destination sticker on. Thinking that he worked for the Airline and this was all that was involved I started to walk away and back to my friend on to hear this loud voice behind me shout out at the top of his voice **“I’ll take good care of your luggage Sir!”** My friend then advised me that I was supposed to tip him at least a couple of dollars or it may not arrive at the destination. So it was hand in pocket and quickly back to give him his “tip”.



I met up with the others in Rochester and the next morning we fronted at General Dynamics (GD) only to find that our USAF security clearance had lapsed three days before our arrival and we had to get new authorisations. After a few calls to Fort Worth and Washington we were told it would be sorted but it would take a few days to come through so we were to wait there. To keep us occupied GD gave us a girl (pictured left) to look after us in the mean time. She turned out to be a Red Indian Princess from one of the local tribes. All she could do was to take us around to meet some of the people we would later work with, take our photos and tell us the best places to eat in Rochester. Still, when we did get our clearances back on the Wednesday, we learnt a lot more about the construction of the Test Stations and the equipment they tested and how it was done. Other than a Company party one night the other nights were quiet so I went to a meeting of the same international organisation that my friend in Texas belonged. Again, I struck up a friendship with one of the members that lasted many years and I

stayed back with him and his family over the weekend when the others went down to New York City. Among the places I was taken were Niagara Falls and down to Letchworth State Park in the Fall. It was absolutely beautiful with all the 1000’s of acres of Maple trees with their leaves all turning autumn gold. Later when flying on to New York you could see the brilliant autumn colours of these trees for hundreds of miles around.



Early Sunday it was on to New York arriving just before lunch and with plenty of time to climb to the top of the Empire State Building and visit Central Park. It was in New York that I found out what five months of listening to Texas speech had done to me – while looking in some shop windows, I heard a couple speaking in a shocking accent only to realise it was an Australian couple talking. By the sound of them they came from the outback of Queensland somewhere. But, at this time, I had not realised just how much talking with Texans changed my own accent, mostly as a matter of necessity, as they could not always understand you and often you could not always understand them, especially when they spoke with a great cigar in their mouth. Later that night met up with

Brian and Max at our hotel, they had more time in New York and managed a trip to the Statue of Liberty as well as several other tourist sights.

Next morning it was down to Central Station and out to [Great Neck](#), Long Island. When we got to the next company (I have forgotten their name) it was another security catastrophe. This time it was the US Navy security clearances that were required to visit this company and, like with the USAF, ours had expired. So we talked generalities with the sales and technical people for two days but with no clearances in sight we were told to return to Fort Worth. The next morning it was taxi back to JFK Airport and “home” to Texas.

Later in October I got news of family illness from home and approval was given for my return. Texas tried to take its revenge when I was ready to leave in early November. Up until that time the weather was still too hot for Blues but the night before I left a breeze blew in from the north virtually freezing everything in its path. The Corporal office clerk/driver went out to start the car to come and pick me up and take me to Dallas Airport only to find the engine had frozen. After a little advice from some Texans he managed to get it going then we were so late it was an very swift trip along the Freeway (up to 100mph) to the airport and arriving a few minutes before my flight was due to leave. Fortunately, as a Warrant Officer and being a First Class passenger it made quite a difference in actually getting on to the plane for the start flight home after such a late arrival.

Arthur is 90 years old. He's played golf every day since his retirement 25 years ago. One day he arrives home looking downcast. "That's it," he tells his wife. "I'm giving up golf. My eyesight has gotten so bad that once I've hit the ball I couldn't see where it went."

His wife sympathizes and makes him a cup of tea. As they sit down she says, "Why don't you take my brother with you and give it one more try." "That's no good" sighs Arthur, "your brother's a hundred and three. He can't help."

"He may be a hundred and three", says the wife, "but his eyesight is perfect." So the next day Arthur heads off to the golf course with his brother-in-law. He tees up, takes an almighty swing and squints down the fairway.

He turns to the brother-in-law. "Did you see the ball?" "Of course I did!" replied the brother-in-law. "I have perfect eyesight". "Where did it go?" says Arthur.

"I don't remember."

The flight home was uneventful until I got back off the plane at Essendon and was greeted by my wife. She hardly recognised me as I came down the aircraft stairs due to the weight I had put on but was even more shocked when I spoke in what she termed a shocking Texas drawl. Fortunately, the Texas drawl soon wore off until I got a phone call at HQSC, Victoria Barracks from a Texas friend several years later. To the utter amazement of my room mates I was back with the Texas drawl in less than 10 seconds into the call.

At least the surplus from our \$US22.00 per day had mounted up and the first thing I did on arriving home was to trade in our old FJ Holden on a new Holden Station Wagon. After a few

weeks of getting the family problems sorted we went on a holiday to Adelaide, our first holiday in 10 years of marriage. It was in Adelaide that I had a reverse of my slip of memory in San Francisco. We were driving in Adelaide and approached an intersection and took a right turn into a dual carriage way and I could not understand why some drivers were tooting at us especially when they were the ones that seemed to be on wrong side of the road. My wife soon put me right and we managed to get safely back to the correct Aussie side at the next intersection.

In all it was a very exciting, enjoyable and educational time. It was not all fun and games as this story might suggest as there was a lot of hard work required to get our priorities in place, learning all the new technology and making contact with all the American suppliers. Not only were we bought up to date on what direction this new technology was taking but I had learnt much about other cultures and made many new friends. The places I visited will also remain in my mind forever as will the kindness of the Texans towards us Aussies.

A Mormon was seated next to an Irishman on a flight from Brisbane to Melbourne.

After the plane was airborne, drink orders were taken. The Irishman asked for a whiskey, which was promptly brought and placed before him. The flight attendant then asked the Mormon if he would like a drink. He replied in disgust, 'I'd rather be savagely raped by a dozen whores than let liquor touch my lips.'

The Irishman then handed his drink back to the attendant and said, 'Me, too, I didn't know we had a choice.'