

## The Life and Death of VH – EAG, aka A20-627.

[John McHarg](#),

Prior being transferred to the RAAF register in March 1979 as A20-627, a B707-338C flew in Qantas livery as VH-EAG. She clocked up a lot of history in her 40 year life after leaving the production line in April 1968, going onto the Qantas register as VH-EAG, City of Hobart .

Planning Notice XP.098/68 dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 1968 covered the delivery flight under the command of Fred Fox.



On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1968, with Dave Harden in command, she was the first B707 to land at Tullamarine, operating local promotional flights before the Terminal was commissioned. She flew her first commercial service on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1968, when she departed Sydney at 0800 for Brisbane, Auckland and Sydney.

She was renamed "Alice Springs" in February 1974, and later that year she'd operate 2 Cyclone Tracey relief flights with 271 and 226 evacuees on board. Not bad. What was the all Economy config? 172 seats fitted, 169 saleable?

### Hostie's Announcements over an aircraft's PA.....

As you exit the plane, make sure to gather all of your belongings. Anything left behind will be distributed evenly among the flight attendants. Please do not leave children or spouses.....except for that gentleman over there."

She'd go on to operate the last B707 service through Brisbane (QF 95/96 Sydney, Brisbane, Port Moresby, Brisbane, Sydney on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1979), and an Antarctica Flight (Adelaide/Adelaide later the same month) and then the last B707 service to Christchurch NZ (Mar 79) And on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1979, with Captains Phil Oakley (Pilot in Command) and Geoff Molloy on board, she'd operate the last scheduled Qantas B707 service. Fittingly, it would be to Auckland, which hosted her maiden scheduled service on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1968



In her last two flights in Qantas livery, she operated QF16 Sydney/MEL with 104 pax stranded by the ATC Strike on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1979. She returned to Sydney as QF16P with 4 pax on board, also casualties of the ATC Strike. They were BA staff. 4 days later she was removed from the Qantas Register.

14,498 landings had been recorded. Happily, she had the same number of takeoffs.

She was repainted in transitional livery pending her transfer to the RAAF as A20-627. This aircraft and 3 other ex QF airframes were later converted to dual role tanker/transport for the RAAF by Israeli Aircraft Industries and Hawker de Havilland.

I last flew on her, from Learmonth to Pearce in 1999 on the flight deck with about 150 thirsty members of the Pilbara Regiment keeping the Cabin Crew busy in the all Economy cabin. She'd been fitted with rear looking CCTV cameras, mounted under the fuselage on the centreline, and this provided a strange perspective of the takeoff.



It was a Sunday and Pearce Tower and Approach were unmanned. Based on the forecast supplied at Learmonth the crew had set up for a left handed circuit at Pearce, with a final approach towards the north for RWY 36R. We were setting up to join what we thought was the downwind leg of the circuit, probably about 5nm north west of the airfield, at about 3,000ft, when the crew noticed that the smoke from a couple of scrub fires in the area indicated a pretty strong wind contrary to that which had been forecast. The crew decided to attempt an approach on the reciprocal RWY from their present position and there was about 5" of purposeful activity as checklists were completed, the aircraft slowed, flaps and gear extended, and mandatory radio broadcasts made advising of the change of plan. After a pretty steep approach we landed without incident.

In case of a ditching into the water, your seat cushions can be used for flotation; and, in the event of an emergency water landing, please paddle to shore and take them with our compliments.

As the RAAF 707's and I approached our use by dates, whenever one was scheduled through Pearce, I'd excuse myself on some pretext or another, take a ground to air radio, borrow a company car and head for the upwind threshold. I'd let the Tower staff know where I'd be and they'd advise the crew when clearing the aircraft to land. I'd park about 70m away from the RWY centreline, just off the runway strip and wait.



There was never a problem spotting the airplane. The

purple/brown smudge was always a giveaway, even at 10nm. She seemed to arrive with a rush, accompanied by the usual high pitched compressor noise, and even on a trailing throttle, the noise was appalling. Now and again a gloved hand would wave quickly through the captain's window and then she'd be gone, pitching up in the flare, rudder flicking as the pilot corrected the drift, and there'd be the usual puff of blue smoke as the main gear touched the runway.

I'd return to the office to good natured jokes about ancient airframes and Ops Managers, and for a while all was well with the world. She and her 3 ex Qantas sisters, and the two non Qantas aircraft, were much loved old airplanes when the last was finally retired last year I think, pending delivery of the new A330 platform.

The last 707, the one thousand and eleventh including variants, rolled off the Renton production line in 1991 after a production run of about 35 years.

After a real crusher of a landing, the hostie came on with, "Ladies and Gentlemen, please remain in your seats until Captain Crash and the Crew have brought the aircraft to a screeching halt against the gate. And, once the tire smoke has cleared and the warning bells are silenced, we'll open the door and you can pick your way through the wreckage to the terminal".

In 1952, Bill Allen, then Boeing's CEO, "bet the farm" on the aircraft's commercial and military appeal, going into production with a very skinny order book. The 367-80 prototype, so named to throw Douglas off the scent, and later simply referred to as the Dash 80 and



now parked in the Smithsonian, first flew in 1954, with Boeing's test pilot, Tex Johnson (left) in command. Johnson, who preferred "Tex" to his birth name, Alvin, for obvious reasons, used to buy a new pair of hand tooled leather boots at the beginning of each new airplane's test flying program, and so it was with the Dash 80.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1955, Bill Allen was hosting a party of Airline CEO's, all identified as prospective customers, on the corporate boat on Lake Washington, while they watched the power boat races and waited for the Dash 80's flypast. Johnson approached the lake at about 400' AGL, and 400 knots. Allen beamed at his guests. Abeam the boat the aircraft suddenly pitched steeply nose up as Johnson began the first of two unauthorised barrel rolls.

*A barrel roll is a coordinated manoeuvre done on a parabola. The aircraft is first placed in a shallow dive to gain airspeed then as the nose is brought up through the horizon left aileron and left rudder are applied smoothly, coordinated back pressure is maintained until inverted then released slightly, as the plane continues to roll and the nose drops through the horizon aileron and rudder are slowly brought back to the neutral position, back pressure is applied slightly to bring the nose back to the horizon. Done correctly the whole manoeuvre is kept in positive G. The control inputs are constant feed and released smoothly throughout this manoeuvre performed about a fixed point on the horizon.*

History doesn't record Bill Allen's comments, nor the content of his interview with Johnson the following day, although Johnson in his commentary on the grainy old video footage, infers Allen was more philosophical than others have suggested.



Johnson sounds and looks like Jimmy Stewart. You can see the YouTube video [HERE](#)

In an interesting corollary to this story, test pilot John Cashman who flew the bugs out of the B777, was told by the then Boeing CEO, just prior his first flight in the type “No barrel rolls...” The only other large commercial aircraft known to have been barrel rolled was the Concorde, many times, during its test program.



Johnson maintained throughout, that the barrel roll, (as distinct from an aileron roll), had allowed him to keep the airplane in positive G conditions throughout the manoeuvre, and there was never any question of interrupting the fuel delivery to the engines.

Gutsy call!!

The test flying program was uneventful apart from an incident where all the MLG brakes failed, causing the aircraft to leave the runway on one occasion, and another where the port landing gear collapsed.

I've been a 707 “groupie” for a long time. I suppose it's part nostalgia and part a simple admiration for a marvellous machine. Like many of you I had my first Qantas flight on the type, and the 707 was the innocent victim of my first (manual) loadsheet and trimchart. It was also the first aircraft I loaded without adult supervision. I had a couple of sessions as the second pilot, in the right hand seat of the RAAF's full motion 707 simulator which didn't help either.

The 707, and I suppose the DC8 too, went into service without any power boost to the



elevators and ailerons, i.e. the effort you put in from the flight deck translated directly to the output at the other end of the linkages. Only the rudder had assisted controls, for the yaw damper I expect. The stick loads were very very heavy and you learnt pretty quickly to toggle the trim back and forward to ease the strain. I'm amazed that the crews didn't have forearms like Popeye. The type, with its 35 degree wing sweep also introduced crews to the problems of “[Dutch Roll](#)” that

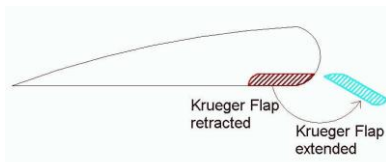
beset the test aircraft before the installation of the yaw damper. The spectre of Dutch Roll stalked all pilots making the transition from straight winged aircraft, like the Constellation, and all the “Commercials” from the Douglas stables, to the 35 degree wing sweep on the 707.

During a Braniff pre-acceptance flight, the crew deliberately disabled the yaw damper to demonstrate Dutch Roll to several junior pilots. The trainee pilots corrective actions quickly exacerbated the incipient roll, to the point where 3 engines were torn off the wing, and the brand new airplane crash landed in a river bed north of Seattle, killing 4 of the 8 crew.

Tex Johnson in his autobiography describes another incident, where he was “paxing” on a commercial flight, and where the crew didn’t seem to be able to correct a persistent tendency to slip into Dutch roll. After several passengers became airsick, he asked to be allowed access to the cockpit, where he found the crew unable to understand, let alone correct the stability problem. The Captain at this point was too airsick to stay in the cockpit. Johnson, suspecting that the yaw damper had been rigged incorrectly, uncoupled the Autopilot, and with a couple of control inputs returned the aircraft to normal flight.

After and aircraft took off and reached a comfortable cruising altitude, the captain made an announcement over the intercom, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Welcome to Flight Number 293, nonstop from New York to Los Angeles The weather ahead is good and, therefore, we should have a smooth and uneventful flight. Now sit back and relax... OH, MY GOD!" Silence followed, and after a few minutes, the captain came back on the intercom and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am so sorry if I scared you earlier. While I was talking to you, the flight attendant accidentally spilled a cup of hot coffee in my lap. You should see the front of my pants!" A passenger down the back yelled, "That's nothing. You should see the back of mine!"

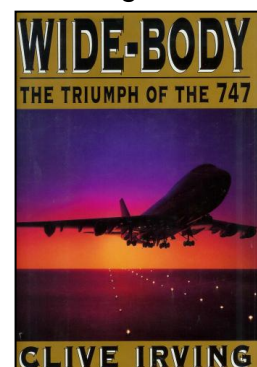
If anyone doubts the contribution these old Boeings made to commercial and military aviation as we know it today, a book called “Wide Body – the Triumph of the 747” by Clive Irving is worth a read. It acknowledges the pioneering role of the 707 in introducing into civil aircraft many of the gadgets we take for granted today – podded engines, plug doors, yaw dampers, variable incidence horizontal stabilizers and Krueger flaps are just a few that spring to mind.



They rightly deserve to be included with the Wright Flyer and the DC3 as artefacts that changed our world.

Sad to see her go and that something that probably took about 6 weeks and a lot of love to build, later serving 2 masters well for about 35 years can be reduced to aluminium confetti in 60 minutes. The giant claw looks like it’s escaped from the set of a Transformers movie. I wish it would return there.

What a sad ending for a beautiful old aircraft!!







## HIGHAM Gary Douglas.

"Sir" Gary Douglas Higham a "Knight of the Realm" with a handlebar mustache.



Gary Douglas Higham, A123509, is not your average wannabe. He claims to be a Knight of the Realm who served in Vietnam and was a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Pilot. If questioned about his Knighthood, he may flash a piece of paper but won't let you read it.

Higham is a member of the Caboolture, Queensland, Returned Services League (RSL) Sub Branch. We are reliably advised that when he enters an RSL Club and when he braces the bar, he insists that the RSL staff refer to him as "Sir Gary", and insisted on being entered into the Bribie Island RSL data base as "**Sir Gary**"

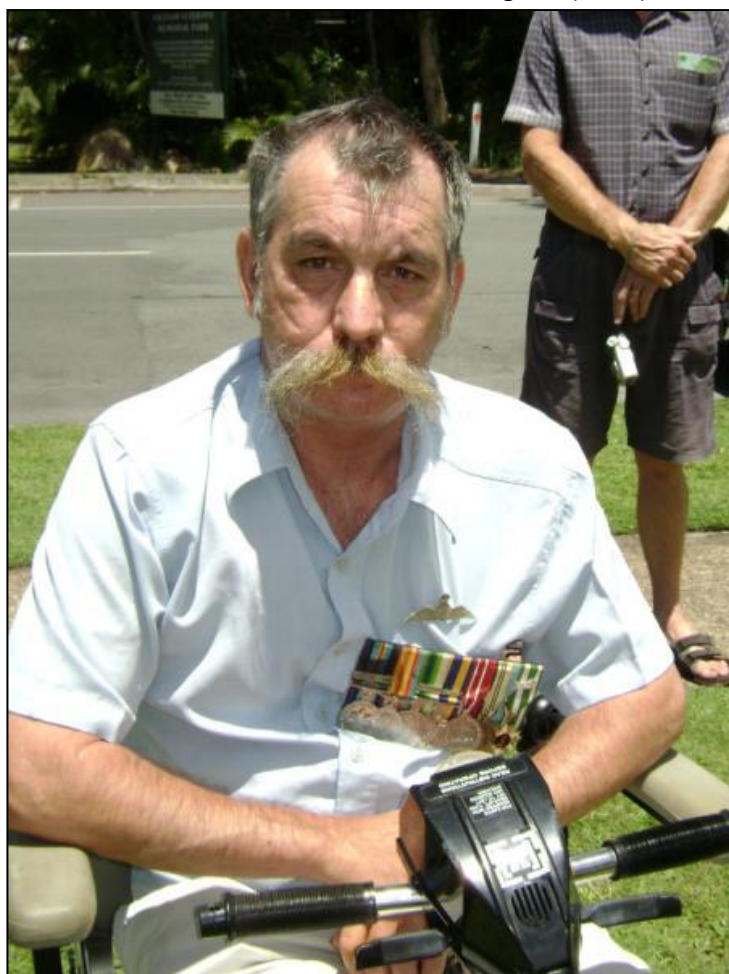
The photograph of Higham (right) is very recent, taken on Remembrance Day, 11th November 2009.

According to Gary Higham he was the last Mirage Pilot and a Mirage test Pilot and he crashed a Helicopter resulting in disabilities. None of those claims are true and we are reliably advised that his only Department of Veterans Affairs accepted disability is for deafness.

Higham is well adorned with a raffish handle bar moustache that any British Wing Commander would be proud of. However, stylish hair around the top lip is insufficient qualification to wear RAAF Pilot Wings.

Notice in the photo that "Sir Gary" wears no accoutrements indicative of his Knighthood, but he does wear Vietnam Medals, Pilot Wings and other medals. His medal rack when compared to his actual RAAF service is sufficient to damn him as a wannabe. These are the Medals he is wearing:

- Australian Active Service Medal
- Vietnam Medal
- Australian Service Medal post 1975
- Defence Force Service Medal
- Australian Defence Medal

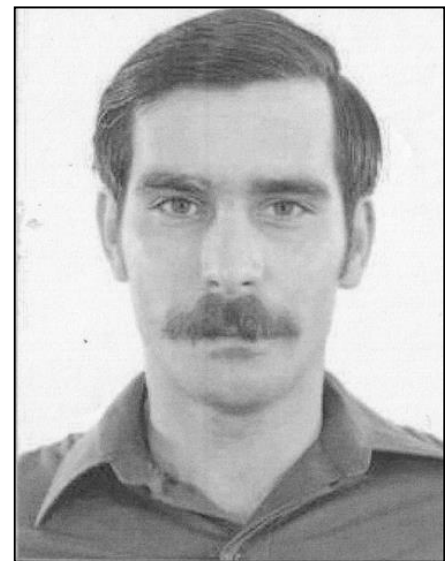


- UN Medals: UNEF II
- Vietnam Campaign Medal
- RAAF Pilots Wings

The only medal of this lot he would be entitled to wear is the Australian Defence Medal, which is awarded to recognise Australian Defence Force Regular and Reserve personnel who have demonstrated their commitment and contribution to the nation by serving for an initial enlistment period or four years service whichever is the lesser.

Higham was born on the 5 April 1958, so in 1972 when Australian involvement in the Vietnam War had ceased, Higham was fourteen years old. On 8<sup>th</sup> January 1974 he joined the RAAF as a sixteen year old Apprentice Electrical Mechanic and was posted to Wagga Wagga in New South Wales to complete his training.

After completing his Apprenticeship we believe he remained in the RAAF until 1982. Most of his time was spent at Amberley RAAF Base in Queensland. (Anyone remember this bloke?? – tb). In 1982 he had attained the rank of Leading Aircraftsman (LAC). Because of legal time restrictions we have no details of his actual date of discharge, however we have an entry on a document dated 5 March 1982 showing him to hold the rank LAC and we are reliably advised that he was discharged in 1982.



Having attained that rank, it is hardly likely he is entitled to wear Pilots Wings or ever flew an aircraft.

Higham has no Military or personal history that could possibly lead to an Imperial Knighthood, and although we have no positive evidence to prove that point, it is self evident that he is a fraud and a wannabe because he is wearing medals from the Vietnam War and other Defence medals to which he has no entitlement.

**Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to smoke, the smoking section on this airplane is on the wing and if you can light 'em, you can smoke 'em.**

Higham never at any stage served in the Vietnam War. During his RAAF service he was never a Pilot, never served overseas and he is not an Imperial Knight. Higham has been cavorting around the Caboolture, Queensland area for years sporting various racks of fake medals, without any interference from law enforcement agencies, who with some coaxing from local Ex Service Organisations could easily charge Higham under the Defence Act 1903, with at least three offences:

1. Impersonating a veteran.
2. Wearing medals he has no right to wear, and,
3. Impersonating a person who is entitled to wear medals.



The veteran community is diminished when it is infiltrated by idiots like Higham and we urge all veterans to keep watch and let law authorities know when a fake is detected. If law authorities fail to take action let us know and we will do their job for them.

We'd like to thank you folks for flying with us today. And, the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube, we hope you'll think of us.

Some advice to Higham. Get the medals and the wings off, shave off your moustache, grow up and stop making a nuisance of yourself.

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