

Dennis Coffey (1/67)



before being available for employment as a P & RT Instr.

Dennis Brian Coffey was born in Brisbane on 28 March 1945 and completed his secondary education at Balmoral High School. He attended the University of Queensland and graduated as a Diplomat of Physical Education in 1966. Before entering the Army as a National Serviceman he was employed as a Physical Education High School Teacher by the Department of Education (Queensland). Whilst at OTU Dennis obtained the rank of Under Officer. He received the Skill at Arms Prize for the highest aggregate score in range practices and the Athletics Prize for the outstanding sportsman of the class. He graduated 7th in the class and was allocated to RAA. On leaving OTU he attended a course of instruction at the School of Artillery, North Head NSW,

Dennis Coffey for the Class 1/67 40th Anniversary of Graduation from OTU, 2007

I graduated from Scheyville into Artillery Corps and because of my former Uni work and the attitude of the system at the time, and although selected for flying training, went to the School of Artillery for what was deemed a "PT officer's Orientation Course". Those who were there had serious university qualifications and the three weeks was more about explaining modern physical training techniques to the instructors than learning about Army PT. Anyway, I then spent some time at 3TB Singleton as a Recruit Platoon Commander before heading south for preliminary courses prior to formal flying training at Point Cook, Victoria (I believe there were a dozen or so postings in the first year out of Scheyville). I graduated (after being coerced into letting the RAAF win the coveted Aerobatics trophy over the Army invaders) and headed to Amberley to complete operation conversions.

Later in 1969 we moved to the new Aviation base at Oakey after the Aviation Corps was formed, and I spent some time on operations around the country before being posted to 161 in Vietnam in early 1970. On return from Vietnam, and after wiping tomatoes from my classy battle jacket, I was posted to 171 Squadron at Holsworthy, where as a Section Commander, I supposedly gained some leadership experience. In 1972 I was selected for instructor training in the UK with the RAF, and the system offered me another five year commission on return for a trip overseas and during that 12 months met a lovely lady (Carol) who later became my wife. Anyway, I completed some 27 years of Army service, enjoyed all but the last three weeks and retired in Canberra in 1992.

Vale: Dennis Coffey (Len Avery, 1970-71 Possum, 161 Recce Flt Association)

It is with deep regret that I advise that 1732683 Dennis Brian Coffey – AAAvn Corps passed away peacefully earlier this morning, 14 September 2013. Dennis had been battling some major health issues since mid to late 2012 after being diagnosed with cancer, however, whilst on a trip to the Middle East in May/June of this year he became very ill and was subsequently diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. He was hospitalised in Abu Dhabi until he was well enough to be medevaced back to Australia where he was admitted to the Wesley Hospital in Brisbane. During the past week Dennis was moved to the Buderim Private Hospital so that he could be closer to his family. Unfortunately his condition continued to deteriorate and he passed away peacefully this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with Carol, Son Andrew, daughter Emma and their extended families.

For those who may not remember Dennis Coffey he was a fixed wing pilot with 161 (Indep) Recce Flt in Vietnam from 30 April 1970 until 1 May 1971. Dennis flew in excess of 1200 hours whilst posted to 161. Dennis had the honour of flying Cessna 180 A98-045 on its last flight in Vietnam on 14 February 1971. From Vietnam he was posted to 171 Air Cav Flt at Holsworthy until June 1972.

Dennis ended up at Oakey for a number of years, before retired from the Army, serving at 173 Gen Spt Sqn and the School of Army Aviation that I am aware of. I think it was in the 1976 that Dennis flew one of our Pilatus Porter across Australia to win the Benson & Hedges Air Race?



Many will remember Dennis's involvement in sport both in the Army and after he got out of the Army where he became involved internationally with Touch football. Dennis Coffey's involvement within the sport spanned over three decades, being the inaugural National Coaching Director of the organisation and the National Coaching Director between the years of 2000-2010. He was previously an Australian Touch Football representative, playing in the 1988 World Cup as well as against New Zealand in 1991.

A service for Dennis was held at the Buderim Lawn Crematorium and Memorial Gardens on 24 September 2013. Along with his family and friends, the service was attended by many former Aviation Corps members, along with a number of other Scheyvillians.

FEATURES:

World Record Flight, Pilatus Porter PC-6 / B1-H2 Reg. No.A14-701 (Dennis Coffey's Log)



Left:
Dennis
Coffey's World
Record
Breaking
A14-701 being
refueled.

The World and Australian Records aimed for and accomplished for a single-engined plane:

1. Distance in a straight line without landing (3893.56kms), and
2. Speed over a recognised course (275.14kph)

By mid November 1982 it had been decided to commence planning for a cross-country attempt in a large tanked Pilatus Porter PC6 aircraft modified with sufficient oxygen including 2,340lbs of fuel for a 12-14 hour flight. The aircraft was weighed to obtain a maximum all up weight of 6,100 lbs. August the 1983 was chosen as it is the annual period with the strongest west-east airflow over central Australia.

On 8 August 1983 an Army Porter PC6 (A14-701) flew from Carnarvon in Western Australia to Amberley Air Force base in Queensland. The original course was set from Carnarvon to Brisbane being the most westerly and easterly airfields but due to the possibility of low fuel the plane could land at Amberley. The service ceiling for the military Porter was 25,000 feet. Over Alice Springs and about 10 hours into the flight the decision was made to climb to 27,000 feet in an attempt to secure greater tailwinds.

The unpressurised plane was airborne for 16 hours and 20 minutes flying up to 27,000ft giving the extremes of an outside temperature of minus 41 degrees travelling with a maximum tail wind of 85 knots producing up to a maximum ground speed of 198 knots. The only food eaten on the flight was frozen Cherry-Ripe. Australian Ugh Boots kept the crews feet warm.

On descent at 14,000 feet into Brisbane and only 25 nautical miles from the airport the Porter ran out of fuel. The civilian air traffic control at Brisbane would not provide an approach and landing clearance as there was a 2-4,000 foot cloud cover and it was 6:30 pm in the evening (basically 'night' under the cloud) with a number of RPT in the area and I was without an engine and basically without instruments and on-top of a thick layer of cloud. My only choice at that time was to glide into RAAF Amberley.

The crew initiated a PAN to Amberley air traffic control and it took some 10-12 minutes to glide the aircraft to a dead stick landing on the main runway. Then the Porter 701 landed it had to be physically pushed off the main runway onto a taxiway. During the flight the crew experienced minor frostbite.

From the other side: Dennis Coffey and Steve Graham welcomed home after epic flight across Australia (Don McNaught 4/69)

As darkness approached on the evening of 8 August 1983 and Major Dennis Coffey (1/67) and Capt Steve Graham (RMC) were on their long descent towards Brisbane, Major Don (McZero) McNaught (4/69) and Capt Leigh (Tojo) Collins (1/70), both instructors in Corps Training Wing at the School of Army Aviation, climbed out of the Army Aviation Base at Oakey in Porter A14-683 to link-up with them and welcome them back after their epic journey.

We met-up on top of 8/8ths cloud as their turbine engine flamed out and they became a glider! In total darkness they descended into, and through, the thick layer of cloud. We gave them 1000ft vertical separation and followed them down. As we popped out of the bottom of the cloud we spotted their rotating beacon as they landed on the main runway at Amberley RAAF Base. Landing behind them, we shut-down and gave them a hearty welcome.



They had to peel off the masking tape they had taped around the cockpit doors to help keep out the cold before extracting their cramped and freezing bodies out of the seats they had endured being strapped into for over 16 hours. The Pilatus Porter seats were renowned for being very hard and uncomfortable at the best of times!

On a lighter note, the first thing Steve threw out of the cockpit to me was a frozen clear plastic "Piddle Pak". It was the size and weight of a brick and frozen solid giving an idea of the freezing temperatures they had been exposed to for so many hours at 27,000ft.

This was a memorable end to a fabulous record breaking flight across the continent of Australia, a test of personal endurance and another epic chapter in the book of the legendary adventures of Army Aviation.

Above: Coffey and McNaught