

Air Commodore JOHN CHARLES THORP 2 February 1923 - 17 April 2017



AIRCDRE John Thorp passed away peacefully at the Canberra Hospital on 17 April 2017, aged 94 years, with his family by his side. A private funeral service was held.

John enlisted in the RAAF in Sydney, NSW, on 10 October 1942, under the Empire Air Training Scheme. After completing navigator training in Canada in 1943, he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer and completed operational tours with Bomber Command in Numbers 576 and 550 Squadrons, RAF, in 1944 and 1945.

After the war, he served as navigator in Numbers 34 and 37 Squadrons, RAAF, and ARDU from 1946 to 1948 before instructional duties at the Air Armament School and School of Air Navigation. Following completion of the RAF Specialist Navigation course in UK in 1950 and an RAF Exchange posting at the Central Navigation and Control School (CNCS) at RAF Shawbury from 1951-1952, he was posted to RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne.

When posted to RAAF HQ in 1952, FLTLT John Thorp was the navigator on the ferry of the 2nd RAAF Canberra bomber (RAF WD983:A84-125) to Australia, leaving RAF Lyneham on 1 May 1952. However, he and pilot, SQNLDR Peter Fisher, didn't arrive at Laverton until 12 May 1952.

The flight time of the ferry, 19.3 hours from UK to Darwin, was about one third of the flight time of a QANTAS Constellation flying the same route. Less impressive was the duration of the ferry – 11 days. Radio problems, a fuel tip tank leak and the lack of suitable ground crew enroute caused the delays. However, John recalled three impressive aspects of the ferry flight:

- the speed of the aircraft, especially with a jet stream tailwind of 300Knots, which resulted in ground speeds of 700-750Knots and the increased demands for accurate navigation.
- the slow air traffic system used to dealing with DC-6 and Constellation piston engine aircraft.
- the lack of noise, which after thundering engines and howling propellers, was bliss.

He also highlighted problems with the Canberra design: the poor HF radio, lack of navigation equipment and the non-existent heating/cooling system. Some of the design deficiencies were to be fixed in the GAF production aircraft.

Other postings from 1954 included Command Navigation Officer at HQOC, RAAF Staff College in 1955, ARDU Navigation Officer, 86 Wing Navigation Officer on promotion to WGCDR in July 1958. He was CO of SAN from 1962 to 1965 (when the author graduated in AUG 1963) before appointment as DORG-AF in Canberra in 1965.

GPCAPT John Thorp then became Defence Adviser in Kuala Lumpur from 1969-1971 before a posting as CO Base Squadron Richmond from 1971-1974. He was promoted to AIRCDRE in November 1975 and was OC RAAF Base Edinburgh until retiring on 3 March 1977.

Lance Halvorson