Suffolk, August, 1953. Gripping the control column, Harry Maule braces himself for the impact he knows is only moments away. Now below safety speed, he can hear the two Avon engines already spooling down. There is no time for a relight, only to plant the bright blue-painted aircraft down on the heath land rushing up to meet them. Saplings and scrub whip at the belly and wings with a cracking sound and then with a crunch, the prototype Canberra strikes earth, ploughing its way through the young silver birch trees.

Harry opens his eyes to find himself several feet higher than his normal eye line; the cabin floor has been pushed up by the impact and the canopy in shards. Barring some cuts and bruises, he is alive and in one piece. He simply cannot believe his luck as he quickly unbuckles his harness and oxygen supply. Pulling his mask off he smells smoke and looking behind, sees the beginnings of some isolated fuel fires. Sat further back in the fuselage, his observer, Mike Burgan is also unstrapping himself and follows Harry out of the open cockpit. Both men scramble clear, remarkably with only light injuries. They have become the first survivors of a British Canberra crash, ironically in this alpha of all Canberras.

On Friday, 13th May, 1949, the legend began, with the WWII ace Roland Beamont shunning superstition and flying the Canberra into aviation history. It was the dawn of the jet era, where a relatively minor player in the British aviation industry would design and produce an aircraft that would play a role the world over for decades to come. Drawing on established design knowledge laid down during the war and marrying it with Rolls-Royce’s new Avon turbojet engine, English Electric’s Chief Designer, Teddy Petter, would propel this new jet bomber design into history.

VN799 was the first of the four prototype Canberras, originally designated the A.1, but lovingly referred to as ‘Very Nearly 800’ by her builders. Beamont’s masterful display at Farnborough later that year became the stuff of aviation legend, wowing spectators with a combination of never-before seen agility in a bomber and a striking all-blue colour scheme. The audience was stunned by this seemingly conventional-looking design and its potential was not lost on foreign spectators.

Wg Cdr Roland ‘Bee’ Beamont
Chief Test Pilot, English Electric Co./BAC, 1947-1979

The Canberra of course was a wonderful experience for all of us who were involved in it. I mean there are highs and lows in every sort of activity, and aviation has lots and lots of highs and its fair share of lows. In post-war British aviation, this was the beginning of the jet era. The jet engine had been known since the war but really practical jet aircraft had not come forward in any great
I had the pleasure of serving as a pilot with 213 Sqn, in the early sixties. We operated the aircraft as a low level nuclear strike and ground attack fighter bomber. In the end of course the airframes wore out; each low-level sortie subjecting the aircraft to hundreds of g shocks. This was particularly true on warm summer days or when operating over the desert. A fatigue meter in the bomb bay recorded the accumulated wear and tear on each sortie. Although most of our flying was carried out at low-level, the incident which confirmed to me just what an incredible aircraft the Canberra was, occurred at altitude.

We were returning to Bruggen at altitude, around 30,000 ft on the last leg of a Hi-Lo-Hi Exercise. Suddenly out of the corner of my eye I spotted two small black specs travelling at speed moving from ten around to nine o'clock. Immediately I knew that these specs were two fighters planning to carry out a practice interception on us. The one weakness of the B(I).6, eradicated in the B(I).8, was very poor rearward visibility and eventually I lost them as they moved around behind us.

After pausing for what I thought was a reasonable time I took evasive action. I applied full power and pulled the aircraft into a tight 3 g turn with the nose just above the horizon. The Canberra did not even shudder. Soon I had the satisfaction of seeing what I now identified as a Belgian Air Force F-84 Thunderjet, spinning rapidly earthwards. Looking out of the other side of the cockpit I saw the other F-84 above us, almost inverted and completely unable to stay with us in the turn. At this satisfactory outcome I eased off the turn, reduced power, dropped the nose back onto the horizon, completed a full turn and proceeded on our way home to Bruggen.

Leaving, I hoped, two Belgian fighter pilots with much greater respect for the Canberra than they had before.

Another incident that demonstrated the Canberra’s capabilities, again occurred at altitude, but not at high speed. The squadron had been deployed to Malta to act as an enemy bombing force. Under the control of the island’s radar was a squadron of Javelins sent out from the UK. To make things ‘fair’, a bomb-line was established which we were under orders to cross at a set time and a specific altitude, something in the order of 30,000 ft. As we approached the bomb line we were a little early. So, in order not to surprise the defences by arriving early, I throttled back both engines until we were on the very edge of stalling; I think maybe I also put down a little flap. We were flying very slowly indeed even by the standards of the Canberra. Suddenly the peace and
role. The ‘belief’ that we were safer at low level, the lower the better, was widespread, but that said, with higher fuel consumption, we could only get around three hours at low level. The other drawback was all the ‘Red’ troops had to do was point their rifles skywards, we would fly through and bingo!

When I was later on 14 Sqn in the ’70s on the Phantom we had our own Ground Liaison Officer on the squadron. Back in the ‘60s on the Canberra it was much more basic and not always successful. The army chap on the ground was not familiar with RAF speak and this led to some hilarious radio transmissions. For example “I can see you”, “You are going the wrong way! Turn left...no, right we’re over by the clump of trees!” and so on. Then was born the Forward Air Controller (FAC) and life became much more organised. One day, on an exercise I was targeted against a Guards lot that were the bad guys and crossing a river. The FAC was a Belgian and obviously a pilot too because as I commenced my simulated strafe attack I was ‘bounced’ by a Dutch F-84; the Belgian forgot all about the river crossing and shouted “Break right now”, then “Go high”, “Reverse now!” all trying to assist me against the F-84. We came to a draw — both waggling wings and going our separate ways. The Canberra had the better turn rate by far but alas I had no armament to engage except the nav’s sandwiches! So the draw was agreed when we were in the ‘Circle of Joy’, neither aircraft being able to gain a ‘guns’ lock on.

On my squadron nobody thought we wouldn’t survive. Of course we’d survive! There was no other option.

Target study was a requirement for every operational crew and you obviously were only given the info you needed. But if all-out war was ever actioned there would be ‘mushrooms’ everywhere. Most people had thought of this of course and selected their own ‘exit’ where they use the Krona [Swedish currency]. Some of the target photos were taken with a telephoto lens through trees and you imagined embassy attaches driving around with covert cameras. There had to be ‘moles’ too, because when the SAMs began to be deployed it was amazing how they always appeared near our routes!

Flt Sgt Les Bywaters
3 Sqn, RAF Geilenkirchen, West Germany, 51 Sqn, RAF Wyton, 1958-1975

I was a rigger in the RAF and my first Canberias were the B(I).8s on 3 Sqn at Geilenkirchen in Germany. In general the ‘target’ or the mission was never really discussed, it was enough to know there was one. We pretty much turned to what is called gallows humour — banter in other words. Also, by concentrating and focussing on the task in hand we didn’t really consider the end results of...
‘Baltimore Jack’ in his element, early January, 1954 at Middle River. As the USAF Acceptance Office for the B-57, Maj Jack Warfield would fly many of the early model Canberras, amassing a great deal of experience and respect for the aircraft. An ardent fan of the type, he was known for his waterfront ‘beat-ups’ around the shores of eastern Maryland. (Glenn L. Martin Maryland Aviation Museum)

Having completed a flight in their B-57A, a sweat-soaked Joe Weber and Pat Tibbs inspect their ‘Quiet Birdmen’ mallets. The Quiet Birdmen was a secretive club for US aviators formed in 1921, of which both were apparently members. (Glenn L. Martin Maryland Aviation Museum)

Test pilot George Rodney runs through pre-flight checks while Pat Tibbs boards this B-57A for a check flight. An eyewitness to Joe Weber’s crash, George Rodney would be among the first on the scene. (via Robert Mikesh)
He had anticipated the worst, of course, and had there been fire on board he was certainly there soon enough to save me.

Maj Robert Mikesh

500th and 8th Tactical Bombardment Squadrons and special duties, mid-1950s to late 1960s

One morning at briefing to be told we would get B-57s. We thought we’d be getting the B-66 instead. The B-57 was an interim aircraft for us — something to go to war with because development of the B-66 was behind schedule. We would transition into the B-57 for jet experience until the B-66s arrived, and we were not to even paint unit insignia on these airplanes because they would be with us only temporarily. Then someone discovered that for a summer, full-load takeoff, the runway at Langley was too short for the B-66. After several months of this back and forth, our primary aircraft became the B-57 and we had to turn in our chrome B-66 models!

At Langley, every mission scheduled was a by-the-book training flight. Kunsan, in Korea, was the forward base for our armed alert bomber force, placed their on thirty-day rotation cycles, while those at home base — Johnson AFB — continued with training flights as we did at Langley. ‘Special weapons’ could not be placed in Japan, but there was no restriction in Korea, thus our forward base with loaded aircraft were on alert there. But when the balloon would actually go up, C-130s on alert at Kadena AFB, Okinawa, would haul the weapons to Johnson for the B-57s there to make follow-on strikes.

Escape from the LABS manoeuver was not considered a problem if executed correctly. It was fun! As to the blast effect, I guess someone with a calculator figured the escape would be far enough. None of us ever tried it to find out and that variable was accepted. The return flight to safety was the tricky part. I had two airfields to hit and two weapons to deliver with a quick climb to altitude and head for safety. My navigator and I knew that we could not even make it to the coast and ditch with what little fuel remained. In the first place, our delivery paths were planned for right on the deck to avoid radar detection. Same on the way out in order to evade fighters. Which is worse, running out of fuel over mainland China that was experiencing weapon after weapon saturating the place, or be at altitude and shot down by enemy fighters? We elected heading for water, hoping to contact an SA-16 [the Grumman SA-16 Albatross SAR aircraft] stationed to pick us up as soon as we would go in the water. The whole picture was pretty grim. What were the alternatives? I didn’t lose any sleep over it! Every one of us on the planet was in the same boat.

A2C Bill Niewinski

13th Tactical Bombardment Squadron, Yokota AFB, Japan, 1961-63

While stationed at Yokota, I was assigned to ‘Red Mike’ as a temporary crew chief while the regular chief was away TDY in Korea. ‘Red Mike’ was the tail code and also all our letters and nose caps were painted red, as was the 8th Bomb Squadron’s birds in yellow.

One evening Red Mike was assigned a late night flight, and an early morning flight, so I had to come in early the next morning and do a preflight inspection. It was just starting to get light out but I still used my flashlight to inspect. I started with the canopy and hydraulically lifted it up. After putting the ladder up, I climbed up to inspect the cockpit. The first thing I noticed was the G-Meter had been zeroed out. That seemed strange because the pilots never did that. Looking at where the wing was attached to the side of the aircraft, there was a large nut that had a red mark painted straight up and down, so if
learned that we would be allowed to accumulate up to a maximum of 15 rads, at which time we would no longer be scheduled for cloud penetration. The normal annual amount allowed civilians at the labs was 3 rads, but we were allowed more just for the test series. During the test series I slightly exceeded the 15 rad max and was not allowed to fly through any more clouds.

The first B-57 to launch carried a scientist from the lab whose weapon or experiment came from. That military pilot became the controller for the samplers who arrived about 15-20 minutes apart and were sent by him to the area of the cloud that the back seater scientist designated. My high rad count was due to penetrating a portion of the cloud that was very 'hot' and I received a larger dose than expected quicker than I could escape from that spot. The most awesome sight was the detonation of a high megaton experiment, which we watched from 30,000 ft about 20 miles away. The cloud climbed to well over 65,000 ft, and the first shock wave threw us into a 90° bank, and the second, a secondary shock caused by the original bouncing off the water, just gave us a good bump. Only the scientists had eye protection good enough to watch it, while the rest of us, even when flying had to put our arms over our inadequate glasses.

The most interesting mission occurred when the experiment was a dud, and I had the nuclear scientist from Lawrence Radiation Laboratory with me. We were both fascinated by it, as it was a very small bronze-coloured ball of energy that we flew around many times but never considered flying through it.

Neither myself or anyone I knew was really concerned about the radiation factor. We had been so well indoctrinated' that I think we all accepted it for what it was. We were given strict parameters to observe when in the cloud and were never expected to do anything beyond them. We all knew it was something you had to respect, and we did. We had film badges on our bodies and in our pockets. We wore simple suits and sneaker sports shoes, all of which we tossed into a barrel in the decon building after a flight. We were always removed from the plane onto a fork lift platform and carried to the decontamination building, while the plane was towed (and nobody touched it) to an area where it got washed down then sat cooling for three days. All of the above was obviously designed to eliminate any hot particulate from staying where it could be washed off-including us.

As with British Canberra development, the Americans were quick to realise the seemingly endless potential of the design to provide a testbed for things not even imagined at its conception in 1949. Its rugged, no-frills nature, and strong, load-bearing wing made the Canberra the ideal choice for early jet experiments with the USAF. Soon after Martin had built the first handful of B-57As, they were farmed-out to various test establishments

**RB-57D 53-3979 prepares to fly into an atomic bomb cloud during Operation Dominic in 1962. (Robert Mikesh)**
a basketball through. The left engine was vibrating as flak had been ingested into the engine and damaged it.

My only thought at this time was to get as much altitude as I could, get as far away from the target as possible, and bale out. I had always wondered if I would have the guts to bale out...now I know — I wanted to bale out! We headed east and when we got to 5,000 ft, I decided the aircraft was going to fly for a while. All this time I had a red low fuel pressure warning light blinking at me to tell me the engine was not getting enough fuel.

I looked into the rear view mirror and saw that Jere was hit. He had blood all over his face and he was pale. So help me, the guy actually grinned at me and gave me a ‘thumbs up’ signal. He passed me a blood smeared note written on the back of his target photo — it read "HIT BADLY ARM + LEG LOSING BLOOD." I continued our climb to 10,000 ft, unstrapped my leg strap from my parachute, got into my survival pocket and passed him a tourniquet to tie around his leg. He had slumped forward, so I pounded on the canopy as we had no intercom; he rose up and took the tourniquet. We were now at 10,000 ft and a long way from home. Jere kept passing out during the approximately forty-five minute flight back to Da Nang.

I didn’t know exactly where we were, so I held a heading of 90°. I knew we were headed for the east coast of Vietnam, but about ten minutes after it all started, the port engine started to vibrate. I retarded the throttle a bit and the vibration eased up. But, in another five minutes, it started to shake again, so I shut the engine down. We were now on one engine and it had been on fire, but was now out. We were down to 3,000 ft by the time I saw the ocean. I guessed we were near the DMZ and expected ground fire at any moment, so I turned south. By the time I saw Da Nang, we were down to 200 ft. Each time I tried to increase power on starboard engine to climb, it vibrated so much that I was afraid it would quit. I had no radios, and I knew Da Nang did not know of our trouble. In fact, I found out later that my wingman had reported that we were shot down over the target. He had lost us in the haze and I never saw him again until we got on the ground.

I headed straight for the runway, causing an F-4C fighter to abort his landing. He radioed the tower and said, disgustedly, “Tower, there’s a B-57 cutting me out of the pattern!” And then he said, “...God damn, he’s got half of his right wing shot off!” That was the first time that anyone knew about our problem and that we were still airborne. When I put the gear handle down, it came loose in my hand. I then made a low pass over the runway while I attempted to lower the gear with the emergency system. The left main and nose gear showed intermediate and the right main indicated up, so I didn’t think the gear was down. The aircraft was shaking so much I couldn’t feel it was down, as you can usually tell by the slight buffet it makes when it is hanging down. I made a second go-around when I didn’t see any emergency/fire trucks standing by. I told Jere by hand signal that we were going to land gear up. The aircraft isn’t supposed to have enough power and rudder to make a go-around on one engine, but I made two.
a chance to drop the bombs from a dive delivery. Prior to deployment to Vietnam, we had practiced shallow dive bombing with practice bombs at the local range for this very circumstance. It was a very basic affair as the aircraft didn’t have any sort of bomb sight, other than drawing a cross hair on the canopy with a crayon — but it worked — and with quite reasonable accuracy, although I recall doing it ‘for real’ did raise the heart rate somewhat.

I’m still of the opinion that the biggest threat for pilots in South Vietnam was mid-air collision. The weather was frequently very poor with aircraft at altitude flying ‘quadrantal’ levels with a radar advisory service and the ‘big sky’ theory for separation. At lower levels you would get known traffic, usually fighter formations, who were conducting strikes in the vicinity, however, there was a lot of helicopter traffic so descending into the target area through an overcast at 3,000-4,000 ft was always an interesting time. Keeping your eyes open was essential but not always easy during a bombing run, as the pilot was sweating about maintaining very accurate height and speed as well as complying with the navigator’s tracking instructions. It was in just such a situation that I looked up to see an RF-4 filling the windscreen coming head on and too late to do anything. I know us pilots are prone to exaggerating things on occasion, but I still believe he only missed us by about 10 ft vertically with a closing speed of 700 kts plus!

...the aircraft didn’t have any sort of (dive) bomb sight, other than drawing a cross hair on the canopy with a crayon — but it worked...

Gp Capt John Bushell
2 Sqn, Phan Rang AFB, Vietnam, late 1960s

The RAAF had Avro triple carriers and could carry six British bombs in the bomb bay. Initially when deployed to Vietnam the plan was to carry fourteen 500 lb bombs. Twelve in the bomb bay on triple carriers and one on each wing. Unfortunately repeated hang ups were experienced, so instead of fixing the problem with the triple carriers they reverted to using twin carriers reducing the load to eight bombs.

For the first couple of years, 2 Sqn used up war stock of British bombs. Once that stock was exhausted we dropped American M-117 750 pounders. Unfortunately they were quite long so we could fit only four in the bomb bay. When we were getting rid of war stock we had a great variety. There were short fat 1,000 pounders, which were great because we could get six in the bomb bay. The High Altitude High Speed (HAHS) 1,000 pounders were sleek weapons, but we could get only four in the

Armed with an internal bomb load and wing tip 750 pounders, A84-234 taxys out for a sortie against a moody sky at Phan Rang. (John DeCillo)
Working in the relentless sun, airmen prep this B.20 for its next mission as a refuelling truck positions itself. (Robert Holz)

Tools of the trade, Phan Rang, 1967. Starting middle left: an armourer installs nose pistols on 500 lb bombs. Middle right: old and new; up close are the American Mk.82 Snakeye type with the ex-WWII stock Australian 500 lb behind. Bottom left: 2 Sqn armourer installing detonators on 500 lb bombs. Rod Farquhar recalled a typical workload required fuzing sixty-four a day. Note the WWII-era Type-F bomb trolley. Bottom right: Maneuvering the bombs onto the Type-F trolleys. (Rod Farquhar)
14 Sqn at work. Starting middle left: a B(I).12 unleashes a full rocket salvo at Kaipara Range in northern New Zealand. (Michael Murray). Middle right: NZ6110 at Korat, Thailand, April, 1964 following a governor pump failure after takeoff. The accident occurred during Exercise Air Boon Choo and the crew were pilot Flt Lt Noel McGuire and navigator Fg Off John Kirtlan. (John Kirtlan). Bottom left: pilot Arthur Dovey at work as taken by his nav. The position of the navigator at the pilot’s feet in the interdictor Canberra was cause for some mirth amongst crews. Bottom right: a wonderful shot taken from the prone nose cone position as a pair of B(I).12s follow each other in for descent into RAF Tengah. (via John Seward).

75 Sqn’s ‘Big Eight’ at RAF Tengah in Singapore. Keeping with national tradition, each B.2 was given a Maori name. Don Smith recalled that WJ605, just visible behind WJ988, was lost with her crew shortly after the squadron handed some of their B.2s over to the RAF’s 45 Sqn. (via John Seward)
facility to his bungalow, heard the aircraft, stopped and looked up at us. The very next second the bucket was hanging in mid-air while the man disappeared through the wall of the nearest bungalow at great speed. The rest of the camp passed underneath and slipped from view without me seeing any further activity.

We cleared the target area, closed the bomb doors and then turned south for about 60 km before we turned directly on track for Vic Falls and commenced a climb to FL410. Again I felt very uncomfortable, leaving the safety zone offered by flying at treetop level, but the RhAF Canberra B.2s did not have the luxury of fuel tanks in the wings like the SAAF’s B(I).12s and due to the unplanned circling at Mongu, were now below Bingo fuel. They returned to Vic Falls to refuel while we proceeded to Fylde, a tactical airfield about 140 km south west of Salisbury where the participation of the SAAF bombers were less likely to be noticed.

We were pulling contrails from the time we passed through FL310 and by the time we reached FL410 we could be seen for miles. Fortunately the clouds we encountered on the ingress were still around and at least hid us from the eyes on the ground. When Green Leader and his formation arrived at Fylde later that day, the repair job to Chris Dixon’s aircraft to fix the radio problem was visible. A length of electric wire was duct taped from the cockpit, through the crew entrance door, along the fuselage to the radio bay at the back of the bomb bay to replace a broken wire in one of the looms. Desperate measures by a desperate air force!

Two of the crews who took part in the Luso strike were killed shortly afterwards while taking part in other operational strikes. On 14th March, 1979, a mere three weeks after the Luso strike, Wally Marais and Owen Doyle in SAAF Canberra 452 were killed after being hit by presumed enemy small arms fire during an Alpha bomb attack on Ediva as part of Op Rekstok. Then, on 3rd October, 1979, Kevin Pienke and JJ Strydom in RhAF Canberra R5203 were killed during an attack on

452 was the only SAAF machine lost by 12 Sqn. Flown by 24 year-old Lt Wally Marais and 21 year-old navigator 2nd Lt Owen Doyle, it was believed to have been hit by ground fire during Operation Rekstok on the 14th March, 1979. Rekstok was a six-day operation by South African Defence Forces against SWAPO bases in various parts of South West Angola. Several Canberra bombing raids had already been flown in support of ground forces when a four-ship formation was deployed from Waterkloof on the 14th. Working in cooperation with Blackburn Buccaneers, they made their bomb runs, after which a scream was heard over the radio and Wally Marais was seen to be slumped over the controls. The aircraft began a series of gradual descents and climbs, the latter possibly being the attempts of Owen Doyle to keep the aircraft flying. Despite efforts to encourage Owen to bale out, 452 eventually rolled over and crashed into the ground, sadly killing the crew. (via Jeff Harrison)
As always, Marcelo showed his excellent skills as a navigator/bombardier although I noticed he was suffering from terrible pain. He had terminal cancer, and despite his best efforts to hide it, you could hear he was in extreme discomfort during these flights. So, we waited for the hour of battle. He began to fly on operations and did his best to conceal his great suffering. In the end he asked me to carry him to the plane and strap him in, but I wouldn’t agree to it because he was now so unfit that the margin of survival was zero, and if we were shot down he’d have no chance.

We began forming crews based on experience and personal compatibility. During the conflict, 1st Lt Jorge Segat was my inseparable navigator. At times we felt euphoric. We were keen to test the capabilities of the enemy, and we broke the tension with a darts championship, in which the bullseye was Mrs. Thatcher. It had nothing to do with voodoo — it was just good therapy.

On the 1st May, Maj Vivas, our squadron leader, started banging doors in our barracks, shouting “Puerto Argentino has been attacked, everyone up!” We then passed a painful few hours until finally we received the first frag orders: two flights consisting of three planes each at thirty-minute intervals. The first flight, call sign ‘RUTA’, was led by Capt Nogueira and his navigator, Capt Sanchez, the No.2 was Lt Cooke and Capt Lozano and the No.3 Canberra was Capt Rodino and 1st Lt Dubroca.

Our call sign was ‘RIFLE’ and our targets were ships north of East Falkland. We would be led by Capt Baigorri flying B-102, ourselves in B-104, and the most junior crew of lieutenants Mario Gonzalez and Eduardo de Ibáñez in B-110. We climbed to about 10,000 ft to save fuel and then started our descent near the maximum radius of the enemy radar to avoid detection. An interesting fact is that the Canberra’s radar signature is exactly three times larger than a Mirage type aircraft and can be detected from twice the distance in the same conditions. So we flew almost at wavetop height, with the flight leader leaving a swirl of foam in the air. Suddenly, we started hearing gasps and then clearer voices on our VHF radio: “Well, kid, you’ve done it now, you better beat it!” Another said “I’m ejecting!” And then another: “I’m hit — I can’t make it — I’m heading for the Islands!”

The latter seemed to be Capt Nogueira from ‘RUTA’. Indeed it was, but due to poor visibility, they had not seen that the fleet had approached the coast and so now they found a defensive wall between them and their target. [This was an anti-submarine group comprised of HMS Yarmouth and HMS Brilliant, who were hunting the Argentine submarine ARA San Luis.] Seconds later they saw flashes that illuminated two frigates, and then, taking form out of nowhere, several missiles and white smoke
The Andes mountains, mid-1980s. A lone Canberra PR.9 sails high over the breathtaking range that forms the natural border between Chile and Argentina. Barring a few small markings, it is identical to the camouflaged PR.9s operated by the RAF. Its pilot, trained in the UK and wearing British-made flightgear, sits under the fighter canopy, concentrating on the task ahead. The mountain chain is unable to stop this reconnaissance flight, as the two-man crew in their pressure suits hold steady at 60,000 ft, effectively untouchable. Oblique cameras take a string of photos into Argentine territory, eliminating the need for politically dangerous overflights and its powerful Avon 206 series engines give the PR.9 all the power it needs to carry out this mission.

Chile was unique in being the only other country to operate the PR.9, receiving three former RAF machines in 1982. This arrangement was the result of its crucial part in supporting British intelligence in the Falklands War, namely in the role of providing radar early warning against Argentine air raids. A longtime adversary of Argentina, the Fuerza Aérea de Chile (FACH) would use these PR.9s to provide reconnaissance along its natural border of the Andes mountains, but also to provide maritime flights to safeguard international fishing boundaries. It takes little imagination to see the value to the British government of having three of these aircraft permanently positioned so close to Argentina, should she ever attempt to invade the Falkland Islands again.

The Chilean Canberra experience began in May, 1982, when a high-ranking group of Chilean Air Force pilots was sent to RAF Marham to commence Canberra conversion with 231 OCU. After completing this initial training, the group was sent to RAF Wyton to train with No.1 PRU on the PR.9 itself. Along with high/low-level PR training for day and night ops, pilots had to be trained for high altitude depressurisation at RAF North Luffenham, which marked a first for the Chilean Air Force.

By October, 1982, three PR.9s, (XH166, XH167 and XH173, re-designated 341, 342 and 343 respectively) were selected at Wyton and preparations were made to
fired. The Range Officer was close enough to the target to report the results over VHF. “10 metres at 12 o’clock” would tell you that your shot was ten metres ahead from the target, and “bull” was the music all of us wanted to hear. The Range Officer was called a ‘coyote’ maybe because he was close to the explosions as in the ‘Road Runner & Wile E. Coyote’ cartoon.

The bomb sight and its analogue computer were anything but modern technology, but dealing with them was a real challenge but always fun. To develop team work with the pilot was the key factor of success. The bombardier had three basic commands: “derecha” (right) “izquierda” (left) and “rumbo” (heading). If you required the pilot to keep turning, you would repeat “derecha-derecha-derecha” and once the target was aligned to the vertical beam of the bomb sight you kept saying “rumbo-rumbo” until the moment you had the target in the center of the sight cross. In that precise instant you would press the button and shout “bomba afuera!” — that was the climax of the mission. All you had to do after that was listen to the bomb doors closing and then the ‘coyote’ giving you the score.

Some bombardiers liked to add a correction factor. For example, if in three runs you got an average “10 metres at 5 o’clock”, you could mark a dot with red wax-pencil to compensate an error that could be attributed to the analogue computer. At that time, most of the interdictors were equipped with an Inertial Navigation System and you could feed the computer with more reliable data. Nevertheless, trial and error was the best way to improve your score, and good communication between the bombardier and pilot was the key to success.

Comandante (Wg Cdr)
Roberto Bonifaz

921 Escuadrón, Grupo Aéreo No.9, Pisco AB, Peru, 1995-2000

I flew the Canberra between 1995 until 2000 and was instructor and test pilot. I joined the squadron in 1995, and prior to that I did a seven year tour flying with a transport unit in the jungle, including commercial flights, which was great as extra income. Nobody wanted to go to Pisco to fly Canberras because it meant the end of this extra cash, the high accident record — most of them due to human errors — and because the plane had been in service since 1956! Consequently, I was a little reluctant to go to Pisco, but as this was the only bomber unit, their personnel were famous because of the ‘Mística Canberrista.’ They had songs, hymns and traditions that made them very different to other air groups. Nevertheless, between 1982 and 1988 they had sometimes only had a couple of planes on strength, and every year the Grupo was going to be closed due to low operativity. But after the South African purchase in 1992 this changed, and when I arrived and there were four B(I).68s, four B(I).12s and one T.4. The B.82 and 56 types were gone or used as decoys on the base. In the end, the last Canberras were decommissioned in 2004 due to lack of engine starter and ejection seat cartridges.

Usually only transport pilots flew the plane after a long tour from Iquitos. The unlucky guys were sent to Pisco and the lucky guys went to Grupo Aéreo Nº. 8 to fly types like the Antonov, Hercules and the DC-8. Prior to flying the Canberra, you flew one month of A-37B or T-37B, after which every new trainee began with the T.4. The plane was...
English Electric Canberra B.2 R2502, 5 Sqn, RhAF, as flown by Glen Pretorius and Flt Lt Sean Morgan on a mission against insurgent targets in Zambia, March, 1978, during which it was hit by shrapnel. Delivered as an RAF B.2 WH662 in November, 1952, 2502 was grounded in March, 1979 after discovery of a cracked main spar.

BAC Canberra B.52 352, 44 Sqn, EtAF, as flown by Bg Gen Mesfin Haile and Col Belete Wondimu during the Ogaden War, July, 1977. The aircraft sustained damage to its hydraulic system from ground fire, and after returning with a hung-up bomb the crew were forced to eject in friendly territory. 352 began life as RAF B.2 WK104 in January, 1954.

BAC Canberra B.62 B-108, Grupo 2 de Bombardeo, FAA, as flown by Comodoro Roberto Pastran and May Fernando Casado on the night of the 13th June, 1982, during the Falklands War. Delivered as RAF B.2 WH866 in December, 1953, B-108 was shot down during the last mission of the war by a Sea Dart missile from HMS Cardiff with the loss of navigator Fernando Casado.

GAF Canberra B.20 A84-228, 2 Sqn, RAAF as flown by Wg Cdr John Downing and Alan Pinches on a mission from Phan Rang AFB, South Vietnam on 14th March, 1971. During the mission their aircraft was hit by one, possibly two, North Vietnamese SA-2 missiles, forcing the crew to eject. They were rescued the following day, one of only two B.20s shot down during the Vietnam War. Note the American 750 lb bomb fitted at the wing tip in place of a tip tank.