

# **The Boy Jet Fighter Pilot**

## ***Operation Dolphins - Book 3***

### Chapter 1

“Dolphin 2, turning in live,” called Michael, as he rolled and dived the sleek Mirage jet fighter down towards the graceful Hawker Hunter jet fighter that was 2000 feet below him, and streaking, high over the unlimited expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

“Clear in live Dolphin 2,” confirmed Jordan in the Hunter, looking up, high over his left shoulder. The Mirage, with its small front-on profile, almost merged with the deep blue sky, as it turned towards him. Then he could see it again, turning and rolling in behind him, towards the target or ‘flag’ he was towing.

“Good Michael,” said Paul over the intercom from the rear cockpit of the Mirage. “Remember to put the gunsight ‘pipper’ ahead of the flag; then slowly let it wander back onto it.”

“Okay grandfather,” Michael responded to Paul who was in the instructor’s rear cockpit of the Mirage they called Delta.

The Mirage was closing fast on the white flag that was trailing behind the Hunter. The ring of dots with the centre ‘pipper’ in the middle, sat next to the cross in Michael’s gunsight as he rolled towards the target. He put the pipper on the flag and selected the lock up button on the control column, to ‘lock’ the radar to the target, so that the gunsight could work out the range from the aircraft to the target. A small green light on the gunsight indicated an immediate ‘locked on’ signal. As the flag began to move across their path, Michael pulled on the control column keeping the centre pipper on the target. The cross shot out ahead of the pipper indicating the lead angle the gunsight was calculating, before firing. The cross would be where the guns were actually firing, and therefore ahead of the target.

With the pull came the G; gentle at first then harder as they approached what was called the 'square corner', where, if the pilot was going too fast and/or at a too high an angle off, he would slide through and not able to fire. At the high G the adema's visual and audio system was warning the pilots of the increasing angle of attack.

Michael had judged it well. He felt his G suit tightening with the pull and was struggling to keep the pipper on the target. It was a bit like flying formation with high G. He had to keep the pipper on target for two seconds to allow the gunsight to work out a 'tracking solution', before firing. He was coping, but then had to judge when to fire.

Paul kept quiet through this crucial period, and he was confident Michael could judge the firing range, having flown enough camera 'gun firings'.

Michael was holding the pipper reasonably steady on the target but knew it had to be better for good hits on it. Nevertheless, he felt himself coming into gun firing range, from 600 metres down to 400 metres. He was sure he had tracked close enough for two seconds. He released the trigger on the front of the control column and fired. The sound and recoil of the single 30 mm cannon surprised Michael as he saw tracers curving out towards the target. It was the first time he had experienced it and immediately released the trigger, eased the control column forward to slip under the flag and then rolled right, pulled up, applying dry thrust. Thirty degrees off the target heading he began to roll back, parallel to the Hunter's flight path at 'high perch' on the opposite side, for another attack. He capped the trigger back to make it safe.

"How did that feel Michael?" asked Paul, who did not have a gunsight in the back because the front ejection seat obscured the view.

"The tracking could have been steadier, but I felt the firing range was good grandfather," answered Michael. "But the loud and violent gun firing was a surprise."

Paul laughed in the back. “It is a huge cannon Michael. Wait until you fire Hunty’s four cannons together. It felt like a bucking horse the first time I experienced it.”

It had been Michael’s first air-to-air gunnery experience. Looking down to his left at the dolphin-like Hunter he was almost in position for his next turn in.

“Just concentrate on steady tracking Michael,” Paul instructed again. “That was a good angle off for firing. Remember also, the minimum angle limit off from Hunty, is 18 degrees. Any less and it becomes dangerous for Jordan, and you might hit him.”

“I understand,” answered Michael looking down on Hunty and began the roll in again.

“Dolphin 2 in live,” he called for his second attack.

“Dolphin 2, clear live,” said Jordan in an almost bored voice. He was not the sort of jet fighter pilot who liked to fly along straight and level, at low speed, pulling a target with other aircraft firing at it.

This time, after he had ‘locked up’ the target, Michael set the pipper on the front of the target, and held it as steady as possible as he came within gun firing range. He had wanted to let the pipper move back to the middle of the flag as he fired. But all of the sudden he was in range, the pipper was steady and he fired.

Delta’s cannon, directly under the cockpit, thundered again and Michael saw the tracers, then bright sparks around the front of the flag. It fluttered free and appeared headed straight for the diving Mirage. Michael jerked back on the control column and the flag skimmed just underneath, and disappeared behind them.

“You have shot off the flag Michael,” Paul exclaimed over the intercom. “Don’t worry about it. I did it is a couple of times, to begin with, in the Air Force.”

“Dolphin 1, this is Dolphin 2, I have shot down your flag,” called Michael still pulling up high above Hunty, and capping his trigger to make it safe.

“At least you know you are shooting straight Michael,” responded Jordan with almost relief in his voice.

“Drop the cable Dolphin 1,” Paul told Jordan on the radio, “and we will return to Savu to refuel and attach another target to Hunty.”

“Wilco, Paul. Dolphin 2 the cable has gone, join me in Attack Battle Formation, left side and hang on,” instructed Jordan sounding like the accomplished jet fighter pilot he was, and not the bored target tower he had been a few minutes earlier.

“Moving to Attack Battle Formation,” confirmed Michael doing a 360 degrees twinkle roll away from Hunty, who was turning left and away from him.

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Coming out of the roll Michael found the Hunter still turning left and descending towards the placid, royal blue ocean below. Jordan rolled out heading south for Savu, which Michael could just see about 30 kilometres away. He slid the Mirage under the Hunter and popped up about 400 metres back, on the left side. The Hunter was drawing away and Jordan must have increased thrust for the ‘break and landing’ at Savu. Michael increased to full dry thrust and Delta surged ahead to keep up.

“I have you visual in left Attack Battle Formation. For a bit of variety should we do a Close Formation break from the North?” asked Jordan. On the previous Missions and on the first couple of their air-to-air gunnery sorties they had already completed, they always returned for a spectacular Battle Break from the North. Everyone enjoyed it, especially the pilots flying.

It was a fairly cool day for the tropics with a high overcast cloud and little wind. Therefore, it would not be very bumpy low level and that was perhaps why Jordan had suggested a Close Formation Break.

“Yes, that would be great Dolphin 1,” replied Michael, excited at the prospect of a bit of close formation flying. He had not done it for as long as he could remember, given his complicated life living in two dimensions.

“Good,” Jordan confirmed. “The Brief remains basically the same. Move into Echelon Port. We will still approach low level from the North at about 550 knots. Make it a one second Break to the right. Do you copy Dolphin 2?”

“Affirm. A one second Break to the right from Dolphin 2,” answered Michael.

“Roger Dolphin 2; change to Savu Tower frequency,” Jordan said completing the Brief.

Michael was already moving up into Echelon Port. He quickly glanced down and selected the radio to the Savu Tower frequency.

“Dolphin 2 in,” Michael called, checking himself in.

“Copied, Dolphin 1. Savu Tower, Dolphin Formation rejoining from the North. We request a low level Close Formation Break right, positioning Downwind for a landing on Runway 32?” Jordan asked the Savu Tower.

“Dolphin Formation, Savu Tower,” began a young and very familiar girl’s voice. “You show offs are clear for a Break as requested! You had better make it tight and steady Michael. I will be watching!” Angela finished with a giggle in her voice.

“Are you terrorising the Tower Controller again young lady?” Paul asked, with imagined anger, of his confident, young daughter, who at 18 years of age was also an accomplished jet fighter pilot.

“Yes Dad, but it is more me wanting to keep comfortable in the Tower’s air conditioning. I am looking forward to being back in the cool, fresh air of Tasmania,” answered Angela.

It was unusual for there to be such informality on an air traffic control frequency. However, except for a single daily airline service to Savu, there was no air traffic around. The Savu Tower was kept open only as an emergency runway for the many Trans – Pacific civil airliners that flew overhead to and from Australia to the United States of America. The facility provided the poor island group much needed foreign money.

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With the extra thrust the Mirage had over the Hunter, Michael moved quickly into Echelon Port. Just before closing right into position, he glanced to see the main island, Savu just 5 kilometres away. There was a very high overcast from a cyclone that had passed north of them, and the air was relatively cool, which, as expected, made the flying smooth. The approaching white beach still looked stunning, although the sea was not quite as blue under a leaden sky.

Michael had a quick glance at the air speed indicator before he locked into formation and it showed they were already accelerating through 500 knots. Michael knew he would have to be very steady on the controls to avoid bobbing around too much at low level.

“Looking good Michael,” said Paul over the intercom. “Try not to see anything behind Hunty, because at this speed and as low as Jordan will probably take us, it could be very off putting.”

“Roger Grandfather!” Michael said quickly, feeling they were going very fast. Although concentrating hard on holding his station next to the amazing black Hunter adorned in the Dolphin markings, he could see the sea flashing by beneath Hunty. Then he saw the beach below, immediately followed by a palm tree – they were low! There was a flash of runway, then the Break. Jordan had banked Hunty hard right through 90 degrees and all Michael could see was the black underside of the

Hunter, "--and one and break," he called out aloud to himself, and slammed the Mirage into a right hand Break to follow the Hunter. He closed the throttle, extended the speed brakes and pulled. There was an immediate grunt from Paul in the back, fighting the G.

Michael was pulling six G, his G suit filling instantaneously with air to help him, while he tensed in rapid succession to stop from greying out as he looked back at the Hunter that was rapidly turning onto Downwind. The ademahr's audio was voicing its concerns about the hard turn and high angle of attack.

Soon they were both on the right hand Downwind, over the sea, with the G coming off. Michael kept the Hunter on the horizon, about 400 metres back, retracted the speed brake and eased on the power to hold position.

"You kids have no respect for your elders!" explained Paul over the intercom, still breathing heavily from combating the heavy G.

"Don't give me that grandfather. You love it," answered Michael dismissively. "You encourage it," he said laughing.

"Actually Michael, it was a great formation and the Break would have been absolutely spectacular from the ground. Great flying mate!" Paul complemented Michael in true Aussie fashion. As if in confirmation, when Jordan called downwind, Angela replied in a very excited voice, "That looked fantastic; I was looking down on you when you 'Broke'." Then, in a more serious voice she called, "Call final, Dolphin Formation."

"Roger," was all Jordan said, concentrating on an accurate circuit.

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Michael kept the Hunter on the horizon, and selected the gear down as the speed dropped below 240 knots. He eased on the thrust to prevent the speed from falling too low. The nose was quite high, a characteristic of the delta, although the canards of the ex-Swiss Mirage did reduce their attitude from the original Mirages that Paul had flown.

Jordan began turning Hunty onto Final, and Michael could see him with a lot of bank on, and the nose lowering towards the runway.

“Tiger 1, Final three greens,” called Jordan. That indicated to the Tower his undercarriage was down and locked, and he was ready to land.

“Clear to land Tiger 1,” the Tower controller answered, having taken over the more serious part of the operation from Angela. Michael watched the end of the runway reach the leading edge of his wing and began the turn to follow Jordan. The ademahr immediately started a gentle beeping with the green light flashing, indicating increasing angle of attack, gradually increasing to amber red with further reducing speed around Final.

It was smooth and quite different from his previous landing at Savu, on Operation Tigers, when it had been really bumpy. He called and was given his landing clearance.

By the time he had rolled out, heading for the runway, the ademahr had barely become excited and was now quiet as he flew towards the right side of the runway.

Hunty touched, ahead of them, just beyond the threshold. It was indicated by two puffs of blue smoke as the tyres burnt rubber after impacting the concrete of the runway. He expected to see the brake parachute billow out behind Hunty, but thankfully remembered they did not need to use them on Savu’s very long runway.

The approach was very comfortable and he was able to appreciate the beauty of the area, which had not been possible the previous time. At 500 feet they were still over the sea and just approaching the runway. The broad, white beach, just short of the airfield ran into the crystal clear, aquamarine water. He had time to see a few tourists sitting on the beach under thatch umbrellas. There was a narrow belt of palm trees and then the massive, green aerodrome. The lush grass was kept well cropped, and down the centre ran the 5 kilometres of white concrete runway that Michael was aiming for. The speed was slightly high, so Michael throttled

back a bit. It required quick scanning at this stage. First he would check the runway for the line-up and judge the shallow approach angle and attitude. A quick look inside to check the speed, then the engine RPM, and make an adjustment, if required. Then back out to the runway, for line-up, attitude and angle again. Paul called it; “runway – speed – runway – speed.” It worked well.

The speed was set. He put the thrust up to hold, flashed across the beach and palm trees and dropped firmly on to the runway, just beyond the threshold, on the right side of the runway. The Hunter was way down the runway, on the left side. He held the nose up to slow the Mirage down with aerodynamic braking. When he felt he was safely slowing down, though his nose wheel was still off the runway, he called, “Tiger 2 down.” “Roger,” answered Jordan, knowing that Michael would not be going around.

As Michael flew Delta’s nose onto the runway they seemed to be rushing up to the Hunter, as the Mirage speed was still high. When he felt he was catching up too quickly he started using a bit of braking on the foot pedals (by pressing the top of the pedals).

“Nice circuit Michael,” said Paul breaking his silence, once he appreciated they were down to a safe speed.

“Thanks grandfather,” Michael answered Paul over the intercom. “The conditions were a lot better than they were on Operation Tiger.”

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They moved off the runway to follow Hunty. Jordan had opened the canopy and undone his mask. He had already turned left and was at right angles to them. He was looking their way and they could see the huge grin on his face, below the lowered visor. He just so loved the sort of flying they had just done, as they all did. It was so exhilarating. Michael once again thought Hunty looked fantastic in that position. All black, with the spectacular markings of a dolphin on its side.

Michael taxied Delta off to follow 50 metres behind the Hunter. As they approached the parking area next to the control tower Michael could see the festive crowd just beyond the security fence. The islanders had become a feature since they had been flying to Savu. They knew the good work the Hunter and Mirage had done to protect them against the Rebel Islanders to the North. However, more than that, they had come to love these spectacularly marked and impressive fast jet fighters, and their young pilots who had provided enormously exciting fly-bys for them.

Andrew, Hunty's engineer was standing in front of where he wanted Jordan to taxi the Hunter, and was moving his arms to indicate the exact spot. Thomas was standing nearby ready to begin marshalling Michael where to taxi Delta. Thomas and Andrew had not been to Savu before and judging by the smiles on their faces, were enjoying themselves, especially seeing their beloved jets fighters back safely from another successful flight. Angela was walking across from the Tower towards where the jets would park. Michael glanced across at her and smiled as he thought of his beautiful, tall, slim and funny young aunt. She was so distinctive, striding out in her multi-patch flight suit, and her thick, shining brown hair bobbing from side to side in the customary, high pony tail she favoured. She had loads of character and was also always ready for a bit of fun.

Michael returned his concentration to following Thomas's instruction to park alongside Hunty. He stopped with a bob of the Mirage's nose, applied the park brake, cut the engine, and started the stopwatch. After opening the canopy, which he watched lifting above his head, he switched off everything in the cockpit, fitted the bottom ejection seat handle pin. Then he unbuckled the straps and stood up with the straps cascading off him. With his helmet still on, he stood on the seat, turned around and fitted the top ejection seat pin.

Paul was doing the same on the rear seat. Michael turned around to acknowledge the applause from the islanders behind the security fence, who had interrupted their lunch to wave at the pilots about to disembark the jet fighters.

Angela fitted the ladder next to Michael's cockpit, while Thomas manhandled the larger, rear ladder up next to Paul. He then tapped on Delta's side when the engine stopped. Michael glanced down at the stopwatch and shouted down to Thomas, "spot-on!" That was too let him know the rundown time was normal. Any change from the normal 1 minute 30 seconds and it could mean something going wrong with the engine.

Michael then turned around and descended the ladder backwards. Jordan was walking towards the Mirage as Michael took off his helmet. Angela, standing close, gave him a pat on the shoulder. "Nice flying Michael. That close in low-level formation can be very difficult," she said praising him. Then, with a glint of humour in her eyes she said, "Did you shoot down the flag because you weren't scoring well?"

"I fired too early," Michael said seriously, defending himself. He did not want to joke about losing the target.

Paul had moved up to them and heard Michael's earnest response. "Don't worry Michael; the Island was able to get a lot of targets very cheaply because they are not used at all by Hunters anymore." Then looking across at Jordan, he said, "I agree with Jordan; at least you were hitting the target." His cousin Jordan, who was now standing in the group, nodded, smiled and rubbed his face which showed marks of the tight oxygen mask.

Michael instinctively swept his unruly hair from his brow, as he always did when he was happy, anxious, nervous, irritated or angry. He was pleased for their support and he knew that the smiling Angela had only been joking, not critical, and smiled back at her.

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Changing the subject Paul became more businesslike. "Angela it is your turn to tow. Jordan will fly his second air-to-air gunnery sortie. You both got hits on your first sortie and now I want you to remember exactly where you were aiming when you fired," Paul said looking from one to the other while he was talking.

“I know you are disappointed with your results, but remember, even in the air force, a good shoot was 10 out of 50 hits. That was with sophisticated harmonising of the guns. Andrew and Thomas did the best they could in our hangar in Launceston, and we cannot re-harmonise here.”

Looking at Jordan he said, “Jordan 5 out of 50 is enough to shoot down a Mig and those five were below on the left of the flag.” Then turning to his daughter, Angela he said, “my girl, your six out of 50 were too high.”

Finally, he looked at Michael, “I saw yours hitting the centre and the cable Michael.” Then looking at each of them in turn, “where were you aiming? Try and recall exactly where the pipper was when you fired. Remember, I said to fire at the same spot, after your first firing!”

Michael answered first. “The pipper was on the centre, at the front.”

“Good Michael,” said Paul turning to Angela. “How about you my girl?”

“Like Michael, I started at the front and wanted to let it move back, but fired early and that was high, front.” Angela said, the excitement rising. A pattern was emerging.

“The same with me,” Jordan contributed. “I started at the front, as you had suggested Paul, and started moving the pipper back. When I fired, it was near the front and slightly low.”

“Good, good!” exclaimed Paul. “The Mirage was well harmonised. In the next sortie you must concentrate on firing at the same spot, in the centre. We will not be able to test fire Hunty because Delta cannot tow the flag. However, based on the success of Delta’s harmonisation, Hunty should be fine and with four 30 mm cannons, it will be more lethal than Delta, with only the two 30 mm cannons.

“We can fly three more times today,” said Paul, moving the conversation on. “Angela, you will tow the flag in Hunty,” and turning to Jordan said, “Your turn to fire. I will sit behind you again, in Delta.” Then facing

Michael, he said, “Michael, we will go in to get a bite to eat. You can refuel Hunty and Delta, while Andrew and Thomas do the turn rounds.

They all nodded their heads and Michael immediately moved towards the Hunter and Mirage as he saw the fuel tanker accelerating towards them across the apron, the exhaust of the heavy, fuel laden tanker, belching black diesel smoke.

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After he had plugged the fuel hoses into the jets and they began refuelling, he sat down in the shade of Hunty’s wheel well, using the left main wheel as a back support. Paul had always said there was a lot of adrenalin flowing during a sortie flying a jet fighter, especially in a demanding one like air-to-air gunnery. Michael felt it then, and sitting in the shade of Hunty’s massive, swept wings, he felt himself slowly relaxing. He had taken to wearing a long, towelling, blue scarf with gold tassels like his grandfather’s. It had been Paul’s squadron colours in the air force, and the scarf helped stop the neck chafing during dogfights, with the head roving around, looking for ‘bogies’. While Michael was flying he tucked the ends down inside his flight suit. But, after he had climbed down from the Mirage he had pulled it out to feel the fresh air on his neck, while the wind blew the damp scarf out behind him. Now he used the scarf to towel the light sweat that had formed on his face from the humid, tropical air and his exertions with the refuelling hoses.

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Gradually, as he relaxed he began to reflect how he had arrived in his enviable position again; of an aviation mad 12 –year-old boy flying these magnificent jet fighters of his fantasies. Michael, and two of his cousins, Jordan and Rory before him, had grown up in Africa. In some strange way they had all loved aircraft from a very young age. It was unusual because none of the immediate family had any connection with aircraft. However, their uncle, (by marriage), who was also originally from Africa, had married their aunt. Paul was an airline pilot in Australia and had bought these two amazing jet fighters. They had become incredibly popular at Air

Shows in Australia. When Rory, Jordan and then Michael's parents, in turn, realised their passion for aviation they had contacted Paul. He then continually supplied them with aviation magazines and models. As they grew older they began to e-mail him and ask incessant questions on everything to do with aircraft.

Rory succeeded very well at school, learnt to fly as soon as he was able, and began airline flying at a very young age in Africa. Jordan, who was just a year younger than Angela, was not very studious. He spent too much time dreaming of flying, to the detriment of his schoolwork. He just so envied Angela, who was always around the jet fighters, and who had begun to fly them at the age of 16.

Jordan's parents realised they had to do something drastic, and it was Paul who suggested he spend some time with them, at their lovely beach house, overlooking the glorious Bass Strait on the Australian holiday island of Tasmania.

There were strict guidelines that he enforced on him. They were the same that had applied to his daughter, Angela, when she was growing up. All schoolwork had to be completed before they were allowed near the jet fighters' hangar. If they failed any examinations, only a pass, on a rewrite permitted their return to the hangar.

It had been a spectacular success. Both Angela and Jordan had graduated from high school in the top 10 percent of their classes. On graduation, Paul had trained them both to fly. Initially, they were instructed on light aircraft and then onto his immaculate, Mirage and Hunter jet fighters. They quickly became accomplished jet fighter pilots, flying with Paul, or solo at Air Shows, sports venues and car races.

Michael was 6 years younger than the other two and had gone through the same process in Zimbabwe, where his school results were also poor. After Jordan's remarkable academic improvement in Tasmania, Michael's parents had asked Paul if he could also board with them for the remainder of his schooling.

Although he missed his parents and two sisters in Africa, he was very content. As long as his schooling was complete he spent as much time as he could in the hangar, helping out with his grandfather Paul's two amazing jet fighters Hunty; the graceful ex-Singapore Air Force Hawker Hunter and Delta, the mighty ex-Swiss Air Force Dassault Mirage 3, with the modified canards on the engine intakes, to improve performance. Even though these jets were 50 years old, Hunty could fly supersonic and Delta, incredibly, at more than twice the speed of sound, and faster than a lot of modern jet fighters.

They were kept in their pristine condition by Paul's Tiger Flight engineers, Thomas and Andrew. They had both been in the Air Force with Paul and living out their retirement keeping the two jet fighters in even better condition than when they were in the air force.

There was an addition to the Tiger Flight hangar and that was 'Belle' the Jet Ranger helicopter that had been given to them by the Elders of the Savu Island Group, after Operation Tigers.\* Belle was painted black like the others, but with a Tiger's head on each side of the cabin. It had been very neglected by the Rebel Islanders, but Andrew and Thomas had restored it to the splendour of the jet fighters.

Paul had taught Angela and Jordan to fly the helicopter and it would soon be Michael's turn – he hoped! The most remarkable and exciting aspect of Michael's life was that he lived in two dimensions. It had first become apparent to him during Operation Gunboat. He woke up on the morning of the mission and there was a flight suit, helmet and knee pad behind his bedroom door that was small enough to be his. What unfolded that day was beyond even the most fanciful daydreams of any aviation mad youngster. He found he could fly the Hunter he had so enjoyed working on. He had obviously been trained by Paul in his double life to fly both Delta and Hunty, but he could not remember the experience.

However, since the first Operation Gunboat he had also flown another spectacular and successful mission on Operation Tigers. That time he had flown the trickier Mirage, and loved the extra power (with the afterburner) and speed of Delta.

He did not know when he would change dimensions, and just continued life as a normal schoolboy in one life, enjoying being in the hangar with the people and aircraft of Tiger Flight; but always hoping, every time he woke up, that he would have moved through the portal and be in the dimension where he flew the magnificent jet fighters. He had never told anyone of his double life, even his family; for fear that it would break the spell.

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He smiled as he sat under Hunty's broad wing, looking out at the lush, tropical island surroundings of Savu Airport; and so pleased that he was back in the flying dimension. It had occurred a week before. After the success at Tiger Island, Paul had decided, with the Elders of the Savu Island Group, that if the Rebel Islands acquired more sophisticated jet fighters to attack their gunboats, they would arm Paul's Hunter and Mirage. The Australian government had given its silent approval. They did not want to directly interfere in the delicate affairs of the Coral Sea Islands. But Paul had proved in the previous two missions that he was keeping a healthy balance between the richer Rebel Islands and the defenceless, Friendly and Savu Island Groups.

The Rebel Islands had acquired two Mig 21 'Fishbed' jet fighters, having lost their less capable L29 Delphins and L39 Albatross in Operation Gunboat and Tigers, respectively.

The Fishbeds were equal to the Mirage, but superior in performance to the Hunter. So it was that Paul had carried out his reluctant aim to arm the cannons on his jet fighters. His informant on the Rebel Islands said that Fishbeds were also armed with the early infra-red 'Atoll' Russian missiles. The equivalent Western AIM 9 'Sidewinder' missiles were too expensive for the Savu people; so Paul had fitted crude 'Flare' dispensers to Hunty and Delta, to neutralise the Atolls.

The planning for the move to Savu by Paul, Angela, Jordan and the engineers must have been progressing while Michael was in his

‘schoolboy’ dimension Tasmania. He had been unaware of the preparation as the flying that took place between his two lives was completely different.

Two days previously Michael had woken up, and as was the norm for him; the first thing he always looked for was the closed door of his bedroom. His flight suit had been hanging there, with his flying helmet and knee pad on the hook alongside – he was going to fly again!

He had then quickly joined the preparation for Operation Dolphin. Fishermen on a remote island of the Friendly Island group reported that a large fishing boat had been ‘herding’ dolphins into a bay of their Island, where they knew the dolphins would be slaughtered. Paul understood that this went on throughout the Northern Pacific Ocean, and it occurred because scrupulous fishermen did not want competition for the fish. It appalled Paul and his family that humans would kill these wonderful, caring animals. The dolphins had the capacity to kill humans as easily and even more skilfully than sharks, but had never done so. In fact, they had always helped humans in distress whenever they could, especially against predatory sharks. To Paul, this was his chance to defend the dolphins, and he decided to move things along and leave for Savu the following day.

The aircraft ground equipment had already left by boat with Angela and the engineers, and would have just arrived in Savu. Jordan in Hunty and Paul and Michael in Delta had followed the day before.

## Chapter

Michael continued to reflect on their lives in Launceston and the magnificent jet fighters that were the centre of their lives. The Hunter and Mirage had become celebrities at Launceston Airport and people would often drive out to the airfield in the hope that the jet fighters were flying. Paul heard about this and approached his friend Pamela, the airport manager, and asked if he could schedule at least one day a month when they would fly and people could come out on that day. It was eventually decided to have four days a month when the jets would fly. That way, if

the weather was not suitable for flying on one day, they could cancel via the 'Tiger Flight' website to reschedule for the next flying day.

Pamela had also provided an extra security gate behind the Tiger Flight hangar in order that the spectators could sit on a grand stand, alongside Paul's hangar and apron. From there they could watch the activities of both the engineers and pilots as they prepared the aircraft for flight.

The pilots would take turns at a microphone, at the base of the grandstand, to inform the crowd of everything that was going on around them, and especially the history and points of interest of their beloved jet fighters. Above all they were there to answer questions, which came thick and fast, because aviation was still a mystery to a lot of people.

Michael also had to take his turn. At first he was very shy and under confident as he began speaking, mainly to adults, but when they realised how informed he was they took him seriously. With that he soon gained confidence. Since he had begun flying in the other 'dimension' he could talk from experience, although he never let on about his 'other' life.

Paul had realised from early on how good it was for his young pilots to become involved with the public. It had improved their confidence and communication skills enormously.

During the actual flying, in between the roars of the mighty military jet engines, the pilots at the microphone did their best to convey to the spectators what manoeuvres the Mirage or Hunter was doing.

Then, once Huntly or Delta had landed, the pilot who had flown would approach the microphone to answer questions. This was the best time for the spectators, because the pilot would still be on a 'high' with the adrenalin rush from the fun they had experienced in the jet fighter during the display. This could be evidenced by the sparkle in their eyes and the enthusiasm in their voices. The pilot would still be in the full flying kit; flight suit, G suit, survival jerkin, leg restraint straps and their faces flushed and bearing the marks of the tight oxygen mask. Often they were still perspiring from their battles against G in the air display where they

had to make tight, hard rolls and loops so that the display would not be too far away from the crowd. They looked very impressive to the awestruck audience. A voluntary donation was taken at the gate for local charities. The Mayor of Launceston was also pleased because aviation- mad tourists were attracted from far and wide. The airport authorities were happy for the same reason, as they soon found that more people were using Launceston for their arrival and departure airport for holidays in Tasmania, in the hope of seeing the jet fighters.

Finally, as Paul was doing it for charity, it was a great boost for the underprivileged in the area and further encouraged more people to the flying days as it was for a worthy cause. He was especially keen to encourage children from Dalrymple School in Georgetown, close to their home, where he had spent many career mornings speaking to them.

## Chapter

Michael would never forget his first Flying Day, shortly after his arrival in his new home of North Eastern Tasmania. He was so excited to be at the hangar, having heard so much about it. Paul had recommended that he should sit in the grandstand with the spectators and experience what they did. Even though he had only been eleven years old he felt it would be ingrained in his memory.

The day had been a typical, dry autumn day in Northern Tasmania. It was early March, the sky was cloudless and the clearest blue; and at mid-morning, a crisp 18 degrees Celsius.

The grandstand was perfectly positioned facing the North-east which meant they were looking across the runways into the deep, green valley beyond. The valley was about 20 kilometres wide and latticed with various cultivated crops providing colour to the scene. As a backdrop, a ring of mountains framed the view. Mount Arthur was on the left and conical with a lustrous, green forest on its slopes. Ben Lomond, Tasmania's highest mountain could be seen rising, in a light blue haze, above a lower range on the right. Its bare, flat, top, was sporting remnants of snow from a recent cold snap. Centre stage and closest was the

buttress-like Mount Barrow that appeared to be protecting the valley and airfield.

When the aircraft were not flying the typical noises of the surrounding farming community could be heard; the tractor ploughing in the middle distance and strident bird calls all around. From that peaceful and pastoral scene one's attention was drawn back to the stark reality of the two, awesome jet fighters sitting on the concrete below them, outside the Tiger Flight hangar. They sat side by side in the sparkling, black, gloss paint, the ferocious Tiger's head and stripes on Delta, and the sleek, flowing markings of the Dusky Dolphin on Hunty.

There was feverish activity around the two amazing aircraft as they were prepared for flight. Michael still felt a tingle of excitement as he remembered that first time. Then, Angela had come forward and spoken to the 50 or so spectators and the look of expectation could be seen on their faces, especially the children.

It was also the first time he had seen the flying display. Paul and Jordan had roared around the airspace in front of them, through various manoeuvres. The people actually clapped occasionally, they were so excited. How Michael had envied them, and now here he was in a strange parallel universe, flying the magnificent jet fighters on an even more demanding task – and, oh, how he hoped it would continue!

## Chapter

Michael returned from his daydreams as he saw Paul, Angela and Jordan strolling back from the Control Tower. He jumped up, and looking at the refuelling lights in the Hunter's left undercarriage bay, confirmed that Hunty's fuelling had automatically ceased, when the tanks were full. He disconnected the hose. The driver saw this and came to collect the hose while Michael jogged across to the Mirage. Delta was also full of fuel and after removing the hose, carried it back to the refuelling tanker and signed for the fuel they had taken. He handed the form back to the smiling tanker driver, who then jumped into the cab and drove off.

By then the others had arrived at the aircraft and Paul reconfirmed the next sortie, "Angela, my girl, you fly Hunty," he began which immediately put a smile on her face; regardless of the fact she would only be towing the flag. She just loved the Hunter. "Jordan, it is your turn for your second shoot in Delta. I will be in the back seat again." Jordan nodded with a beaming smile; he lived for this action.

Finally, Paul turned to Michael, "Michael, you can help us strap in and then go to the end of the runway with the 'Firey' (fireman) and connect the flag to Hunty for take off," Paul concluded.

## Chapter

With that they turned to their respective aircraft. Andrew and Thomas walked with Paul and Jordan to the Mirage, so Michael jogged to catch up with Angela. As he came alongside her, she smiled down at him. "I am coming to strap you in Missy," quipped Michael, and quickly dodged a playful slap from Angela.

"Still being cheeky, Michael?" laughed Angela as she continued to stride purposefully towards the waiting Hunter. Their earlier altercation was forgotten. Michael had been teasing her, using the word of admonishment Paul used, 'missy,' when she had done something he was not all that happy with.

Then, more seriously, Angela continued, "Are you happy with the flag hook up Michael?"

"Yes; I was with grandfather when he did it," replied Michael. He then recalled for her what he would have to do; "As soon as you are ready to start, the 'Firey' and I will drive down in his fire truck to the beginning of the runway. We will lay out the metal, coiled cable down the first 600 metres of the runway with the actual target on the threshold, lying on its side. You will then taxi down to the pickup point. I will fit the attachment to the dive brake bracket." (To release the target, especially in a hurry; all the Hunter pilot had to do was to select the dive brake out and the whole

cable and target would fall away). "That sounds fine Michael," confirmed Angela.

When they arrived by the shining, black Hunter, Angela put her helmet over the ladder, climbed up and had a quick check of the cockpit; then jumped back down onto the concrete and began her walk round inspection.

While she was doing that Michael climbed up the ladder to tidy the cockpit for Angela and have the ejection seat and parachute straps ready for her.

## Chapter

Michael stepped back down onto the ground as Angela came around the left drop tank, and waited while she adjusted the G suit and survival jerkin, so that she would be comfortably strapped tightly into the cramped cockpit. She stamped around a bit to get comfortable, then bent down, moved the leg restraint straps to the correct position below each knee and on straightening up tied up her long pony tail again.

She looked at Michael, with a huge smile and eyes creased up against the bright glare off the concrete. "You will be flying Hunty next time, when I do my second gun firing Michael," Angela said. She was in the 'zone' again -- this is what she lived for. Just being around these fast jets made her happy, but flying them on even a mundane task, like target towing, and she was ecstatic. Michael felt the same and grinned back as she turned to climb the ladder.

Once she had checked the ejection seat and turned around, she sat down and Michael climbed the ladder to help her strap in.

Michael had often done this for them, but still enjoyed watching the pilots, methodically strap themselves to the ejection seat.

When Angela had fitted the lap straps, Michael passed her the shoulder straps, one at that time, when she reached for them. Then he took her helmet from the side of the ladder and gave it to Angela once she had adjusted her hair so that it would not be uncomfortable under the helmet.

Until the helmet was on Michael and Angela talked about what they would be having for dinner that night. They were having a wonderful time at the resort by the beach, almost like a holiday. Like all young, thriving teenagers they seemed to be always eating, and the food in the resort was more exotic than they were used to. This sort of relaxed chatter had surprised Paul in this situation, and had earlier remarked how surprised he was that they were not more worried about impending air battles against the formidable Mig 21 'Fishbeds'. Jordan had replied for all of them by saying, "We think about it but we have worked hard in training and have already proved ourselves." That was true and they were obviously looking forward to their next engagement.

Once Angela had her helmet on she could no longer hear Michael and he just waited until she was ready for him to remove the top ejection seat pin. She reached down and pulled out the bottom ejection seat pin and showed it to Michael. That was his cue to remove the top ejection seat pin. He then showed it to her. The seat was now 'live'. They placed the pins into slots inside of the canopy rail, where they would remain during the flight, in case Angela had to eject.

Still smiling, Angela looked up at him and Michael said, "Have fun!" He then climbed down the ladder with Angela immediately looking down, inside the cockpit, to begin her Pre-start Checks.

## Chapter

At the bottom of the ladder Michael flipped up the catch to release it from the side of the Hunter and carried it away. Andrew and Thomas had also completed strapping in Paul and Jordan, and were walking with their steps to a position in front of the jets, next to the security fence. They put all the steps together and again waved to the islanders enjoying the spectacle and a feast behind the fence.

"Here comes the fire truck Michael," said Thomas looking towards the Control Tower. "Are you happy with the target attachment?"

"Yes, thanks Thomas," Michael answered.

"Good. Andrew and I will marshal Hunty and Delta out while you go and lay the target," Thomas continued.

"No worries!" responded Michael and Thomas moved to give him a playful slap on the shoulder. Michael was always teasing them with Aussie slang, said in his African accent. Michael dodged, laughing, and ran to the approaching fire truck, whose driver displayed the characteristic huge, island smile, through the windscreen.

Michael jumped onto the back of the utility, with the target (flag) and the coiled up cable. With that the driver accelerated towards the beginning of the runway. They both knew what to do and at the threshold of the runway, the fire truck stopped. Michael threw the target over the side and the driver continued slowly down the runway, as Michael uncoiled the cable over the back of the open truck. The driver watched carefully, and if he saw a snag in the cable, he stopped to let Michael unravel it.

The cable was 600 metres long, and laid out on the left side of the runway so that Angela would be able to taxi beside it, to the connect point. Michael jumped off the truck with all the cable on the ground. The driver drove off the runway and back towards the threshold. He had to ensure the flag was lying correctly, on its side, to be pulled into the air by the Hunter.

It was quiet on the runway as Michael crouched down checking the clasp that would engage on Hunty's dive brake. All he could hear was the light surf lapping on the beach beyond the trees. The sun was still not out above the high overcast but Michael was pleased he had put on his "Tiger Flight" baseball cap because of the glare off the runway. A gentle breeze blew in from the sea but it was not enough to really cool him.

Then Michael heard an increasing roar and knew that jet fighters must have begun to taxi. He stood up and saw Hunty move forward, and the jet noise died as Angela turned the Hunter towards the runway. Another roar began and the Mirage moved to follow the Hunter. Michael gave his face one last wipe with his towelling scarf as the Hunter turned and rolled onto

the runway and then, in Angela's characteristic way, heard a burst of thrust as she rushed down the runway towards him.

Once again it gave him instant 'goose bumps' as he saw the gloss black Hunter bearing down on him. It looked so predatory from the front, especially as it was silhouetted against the heat haze from the exhaust the behind it.

Angela slowed the thunderous Hunter as she came abeam him. He could see her huge smile below the lowered visor, with the canopy still open. He smiled back. Michael was standing far enough off the runway so that looking back, she could see him, and he could signal to her when the Hunter's dive brake was over the cable clasp. When that happened he put his flat hand up sharply and Hunty stopped with a jerk, and bobbed a couple of times on the nose wheel.

Looking towards Angela he saw she had put both her hands on the top of canopy rail. That way she could not bump the dive brake switch on the throttle. Doing that would deploy the powerful dive brake beneath the Hunter's rear fuselage, which could hit Michael who would be attaching the cable.

Michael gave Angela a thumbs up and in a crouch ran towards the rear of the jet fighter. He was pleased he had worn his ear defenders over his baseball cap because he could still hear the loud roar of the powerful Avon engine and the ground seemed to tremble as he bent to pick up the end of the cable. Then, with one knee on the runway, he grasped the cable clasp with both hands and clicked into the attachment at the rear of the dive brake. He then gave the cable a sharp tug to ensure it was secure.

Before running back off the runway, he gave the bottom of the Hunter and quick glance. He wanted to make sure nothing was out of place. His grandfather said it was professional to always ensure they always looked for anything amiss. He then ran back onto the grass next to Angela and gave her a thumbs up. She returned it, and smiled before fitting her oxygen mask over her nose and mouth. Her head lowered and Michael

knew she had selected the canopy closed and saw it move forward and lock into position.

## Chapter

Almost immediately there was an increasing roar of the Hunter engine, and it moved forward slowly, taking up the slack in the cable. When it looked taught Michael turned towards Angela who was now looking back at him again and gave her another thumbs up and a wave. Angela just nodded and looked forward. The roar and whine increased suddenly and Michael crouched with his hands forcing the ear defenders against his ears. It helped, but not much. The sound was like thunder, and the ground shook as the Hunter accelerated down the runway. Soon after, he saw the target, on its side, rushing past, still on the runway, as if trying to catch the Hunter.

The sound receded slightly as Michael watched Hunty lifting off, with the flag following and rotating through 90 degrees once off the ground, into the position required as a target.

Michael had done his job and while still watching the Hunter and flag turning north towards the open ocean, another roar erupted down the runway.

Michael had forgotten the Mirage, and turned around to see Delta hurtling down the runway towards him. The awesome, sleek jet fighter had its nose down and was accelerating very rapidly. Delta's roar was even greater than Hunty's, with its afterburner. By the time it passed Michael it was already going over 200 kilometres an hour. The roar and crackle were horrendous. Looking at the cockpit he could see Jordan, helmeted in the forward cockpit, looking forward, concentrating on the take off; but Paul in the back gave a quick wave and they were passed and soon climbing steeply into the air. The Mirage's black and delta plan form looked spectacular against the green jungle at the other end of the field. Then it turned left to follow the Hunter.

## Chapter

The noise of the jets slowly dissipated and before long Michael could hear the surf again. While he stood and waited for the fire truck to pick him up, he contemplated the awesome spectacle he had just witnessed and was reminded once again of what Paul had sent to him in an email, about very similar situations he had experienced in the air force when he was a technician, before he was able to begin pilot training. Michael could remember the email, almost word for word.

‘The feeling of awe I felt for this stage of a flight, in a fast jet fighter, began with the tremendous impression made on me when I was a technician. I would go to the beginning of the runway with the armourers to insert the electrical plug that armed the explosive stores (weapons and drop tanks) prior to a weapons mission. We would be waiting at the threshold of the runway at Thornhill. The Hunters could be heard before they were seen, approaching from the dispersal. After the quiet and solitude at the corner and lowest point of the Fighter Base, the deep roar of the Hunters would be apparent, then against the contrasting backdrop of a line of huge blue gums, the pair (or pairs) of Hunters would emerge out of the heat haze of the taxiway in their grey and green RAF camouflage of that time. They would approach, bearing down the hill towards us. The Hunter had sleek lines, but with gun ports, Sabrinas, drop tanks and airbrake (slung below the rear fuselage), they had a very aggressive quality. They would be suddenly upon us, filling our vision. They always seemed to taxi fast with the pilot’s heads darting this way and that, while they did their pre-take off procedures and checked the approaches were clear before rushing onto the runway. The pilots looked so impersonal behind their helmeted heads with oxygen masks fitted and visors down. Oh, how I wanted to be one of them!

Even at idle, the roar of the Avons was deafening and we donned our ear defenders as the aircraft came to a bouncing halt in echelon starboard formation. With their cockpits still open, the pilots applied the parking brake and put their gloved hands above their heads, on the canopy rail, to indicate to us that we could plug in, because their fingers were away from the triggers.

I always remember as I moved, running onto the runway, the size of the Hunters seemed to magnify with all the noise, the heat haze from the jet pipes, the smell of burnt fuel and the grass bending to the force of the idling Avon. It all heightened the expectation that something explosive was going to occur.

The plug was under the port wing root, so required a stoop under the fuselage to connect it. Sometimes there would be four, or maybe more, Hunters, and from that lowered position, looking around, gave me a feeling of insignificance with all the awesome power being generated. Ensuring the plug was inserted and the cover secured I would dart out the side of the runway to give my pilot the thumbs up. Once we had all done that, the pilots' hands and heads would go down as the canopies closed, electrically over them. Almost immediately a deep thunderous roar would begin as the engines were advanced to 85% power, and the noses of the Hunters would dip against the brakes. The lead pilot would look back at his number two for thumbs up, and with that put his head back against the ejection seat headrest. By this stage everything seemed to shaking, and our hands were over our ear defenders, but could not keep our eyes from the spectacle that was occurring. Then, down came the lead pilot's head and brakes were released. The Hunters literally leapt away, and as both engines were gunned to maximum power the thunder and crackle became overpowering, and I had to crouch with my arms over my chest, all the while amazed at the acceleration of the jets. Very quickly they were disappearing up the runway, the number two pilot's head glued towards that of the lead. Then they were over the hill, and almost immediately visible again as they climbed away in perfect formation. We would remove our ear defenders and prepare to return to the dispersal on our motorbikes.

Soon, the sound receded and the quiet was as stark as the deafening noise had been, until gradually we could hear the birds, insects and nature again. I volunteered to go down whenever I could, although it was not my job. I don't know if it was my love of aircraft or my young age at that time, but that spectacle had such a profound effect on me that I never tired of it, and the scene will stay with me all my life'. Michael knew exactly what his grandfather meant.

## Chapter

While in deep thought and watching the distant jet fighters, with just the faint sound of the departing jet engines, the fire truck pulled up beside him. He climbed onto the back, stood up and let the wind cool him as they drove back to the dispersal where the ground equipment was.

The jets would only be away about 30 minutes and he wanted to help Thomas and Andrew prepare everything ready for their return. He especially wanted to watch their return. In Launceston they very seldom flew beat ups on their return from flights -- it would cause too many noise complaints if it was done without warning. They had done several on recent missions in the Coral Sea, and Michael had been lucky enough to have been flying in all of those, except the one on Operation Tiger when Angela had surprised Michael by approaching fast and low from behind. It had given him a huge fright and provided much entertainment to the islanders behind the security fence when he fell off Delta's wing. They only seemed able to fly beat ups when Michael was in his 'flying dimension,' which is why he wanted to see it and also watch them land.

## Chapter

The two engineers and Michael had soon tidied up the ground equipment. While Andrew and Thomas chatted together Michael wandered across to the fire truck next to the Control Tower. He asked the driver if they could watch the return of Delta from the threshold of the runway on which they would be landing. Hunty would first to fly over the runway to drop the target, if it had not been shot down, then land. Before that he was hoping Jordan would do a beat up in Delta – he was sure he would!

The Islander fireman was only too happy to oblige. The Tiger Flight detachments to Savu were the most excitement the locals had ever experienced. Michael felt all the islanders loved the jets as much he did.

So Michael climbed into the back of the truck again, and stood up, holding onto the roll bar as they drove to the runway threshold. As soon as they

came to a stop Michael clambered further up, onto the roof of the fire truck cab. With a huge grin the fireman considered it a good idea and joined him. Together they looked north, out to sea. The runway was higher than the beach, and standing on top of the cab, Michael and the fireman could see over the palms surrounding the airfield, to the open Pacific Ocean beyond.

They were on lookout for Delta, because they knew, or hoped, it would be going so fast that it would be visible before they could hear it. Michael was the first to spot the dot just above the horizon. He excitedly pointed it out to the Islander as it rapidly grew in size. The Mirage was almost over the beach before there was any sound. It passed halfway down the runway as Jordan was aiming for the tower. The climax occurred all at once. There was a crescendo of noise, a flash as Delta streaked over the palms and then was rolling away from them and climbing onto Downwind.

It had all occurred so rapidly and as the jet continued its turn onto Downwind Michael found himself still holding his hands firmly over his ears, and watching in awe the slowing fighter with the jet noise now just a grumble.

How spectacular had that being? The flash and crash of noise was even more than he had expected. It had just been so cool!

The Mirage was soon turning Final and Michael watched, once again, the sleek jet rushing past the beginning of the runway where they were watching, to land firmly, just beyond the threshold. As the Mirage receded down the runway, becoming a shimmering illusion in the heat haze of the runway, the sound of another jet could be heard. Looking back to the North again, Michael could see Hunty positioning about 200 feet above and lined up just to the left of the runway. The target was gamely following the Hunter. Angela flew Hunty at a moderate speed and once over the grass, north of the runway she would drop it where the fireman and Michael would pick it up. Angela positioned Hunty perfectly, and released the target. It fluttered a couple of times, and then began a rapid descent as the heavy coupling and cable pulled it towards the earth. It all crashed together on the grass, and the fireman was about to climb down

from the back of the truck, but Michael asked him to wait. He wanted to also watch the Hunter's approach and landing. It was already on Downwind with the undercarriage going down.

It wasn't long before Hunty was on Final, turning for the runway. The familiar, aggressive pose of the Hunter, with gear lowered and full flap extended, excited Michael once again. It was such an imposing sight. The roar and whine of the jet increased as Angela put up the thrust to hold the approach speed. She rolled out, wings level, about 500 feet from the threshold and Hunty increased rapidly in size until the Hunter seemed to fill their vision, they were that close to the runway. As Angela made final adjustments, the Hunter twitched from the sensitivity of the powered controls. They could see her peering intently over Hunty's nose to the spot where she wanted to touch. There was a final roar and whine and the Hunter flashed passed them at 260 kilometres an hour and landed firmly just past threshold with two puffs of blue smoke and a squeal, as the main wheels touched. The Hunter continued away from them down the concrete runway with the nose still high, as Angela used aerodynamic braking to slow it, having not used the brake parachute on the long runway, the same as Jordan.

Both Michael and the fireman had huge grins on their faces as they climbed down from the back of the fire truck and into the cab. The jet fighters had once again made Michael feel so alive. He felt elated as they drove to where the target lay.

## Chapter

Arriving at the spot where the target had landed, it was all in a crumpled heap but Michael could already see it had taken several hits -- excellent, his grandfather's instruction had worked -- Jordan would be stoked!

As the fire truck stopped, he jumped out and soon had the target and cable in the back of the utility. They rushed back to where the jets were parked and arrived just as Angela was climbing down from Hunty's cockpit, the engine still clattering to a stop. Jordan and Paul, in their soaked flying kit and still holding their helmets in their arms, were already waiting next to

the Hunter and looking towards the approaching fire truck. From the smiles on their faces Michael realised Jordan knew he had been hitting the target.

"It looks good Jordan," Michael said as he climbed into the back of the fire truck and threw the target onto the ground.

"Thanks Michael, it did feel really good," Jordan answered as he and Paul rapidly untangled the target to lay it flat on the concrete. The 'ball' rounds that they used for training (ball meant they were solid lead, that would not explode when it hit the target) were dipped in coloured paints so that, as they hit the metal mesh target, they left a splash of colour to confirm a hit. Each pilot had a different colour.

"One, two, three --" began Paul excitedly, as he crouched over the flag and counted.

Standing up finally, Paul turned to Jordan. "20 hits out of your 50 rounds; that is fantastic Jordan!" He exclaimed. "However, what is more important is that they are fairly well bunched around the front and middle, where I assume you were aiming?"

"Thanks Paul," answered a flushed Jordan. "Yes, that is where I was aiming and I think most of the hits were on my last two passes because I felt more relaxed and the tracers seemed to be going into the target."

Paul was overjoyed because, without the normal equipment the air force used for harmonising, they had achieved an outstanding result, and he initiated the high-5s all round. That immediately got the islanders going again, and Tiger Flight pilots and engineers looked across to them and waved, still laughing.

## Chapter

Once the excitement decreased slightly, Paul looked at Angela and said, "Your turn my girl," and turning to Michael, "you tow the target in Hunty, Michael."

Angela beamed her acknowledgement; Michael nodded, and saw Jordan, next to Paul, looking relieved that he would not have to tow the flag, which would have meant another slow, boring flight, in his eyes. That surprised Michael who, like Paul and Angela, relished any chance to fly either of the jet fighters, in any capacity.

There was a hive of activity around the jet fighters as the pilots and engineers carried out tasks allocated to them by Paul. They wanted to be airborne again as soon as possible. Changing the 2 cannon gun pack on the Mirage required 3 of them. The pack was lowered by means of 2 small mechanical winches, one attached to each side of the aircraft. Once the spent pack was on its cradle on the ground, it was wheeled away and a full pack replaced it and then raised and locked into position. (The Hunter had a very similar pack system, but with 4 x 30mm cannons). The whole procedure was very quick, and the jet fighters could be re-armed before the refuelling was complete. The only replenishing required on their training was the one Mirage gun with 50 ball rounds, they used for firing at the target. The other gun was fitted with high explosive (HE) in case they were attacked whilst practising. So, Hunty and Delta's HE guns remained dormant while they were training, only to be used if they were required against the Fishbeds.

With the new pack locked into position, Paul, Angela and Jordan moved the winches and spent gun pack away from Delta, while Michael completed the refuelling and the engineers, their turnarounds on the jets.

## Chapter

It was just after lunch when they were strapped in and ready to fly again. Jordan had passed Michael his straps and briefed him on attaching, then towing the target. He had watched Angela on the previous sortie and so had a good idea of what to do anyway.

The target towing Hunter led the formation; so once Michael had the thumbs up from Angela in Delta's front cockpit, he signalled Andrew, the engineer, for start clearance.

They were soon taxiing for the runway, the Hunter leading a long way ahead of the Mirage because Michael still had to taxi up the runway to have the target attached, as he had done for Angela.

Jordan was waiting next to the runway alongside the end of the cable, with the fire truck and smiled as Michael taxied slowly passed him. Michael waved from the open canopy, and despite the breeze blowing into the cockpit, he was sweltering in the early afternoon heat and with all the flying clothing he was wearing. So it was with relief that Jordan gave him signal to stop. He put his hands up on the canopy coaming, and Jordan disappeared to attach target beneath the aircraft. He was soon back, alongside, giving thumbs up. Michael returned it and lowered his head as he selected the canopy closed. He eased on the thrust and moved slowly forward until he was sure the target line was taut when Jordan gave him another thumbs up, then he selected full thrust and Hunty began to accelerate. There was not much difference in the take off, but once he was airborne he felt the occasional tug of the target and the rate of climb was a bit lower than normal as he turned north to the firing area.

He heard the Tower give the Mirage take off clearance and looking back he saw the sleek, black jet fighter begin to move down the runway.

## Chapter

Michael levelled off at 15,000 feet, flying at 250 knots, heading north, still under a high overcast sky. Below them was a haze on the royal blue Coral Sea, but still clear enough for Michael to see that there were no ships below, that the live firing might inadvertently hit. That was Michael's responsibility because Angela and Paul would be concentrating on positioning and then shooting the target behind the Hunter.

"Tiger 2, positioned high perch, port side," Angela suddenly said. Michael looked up to his left, and 3 kilometres up against the thin cloud he saw the ferocious Tiger markings on the side of the black Mirage.

"I have you in sight, Tiger 2," Michael replied, "go Tiger frequency."

“Tiger 2 in,” Angela called, checking in on their own radio frequency.

“Loud and clear, Tiger 2,” Michael replied again. Then to the tower, who were monitoring their Tiger frequency, in case an airliner came into the area, which would obviously have been dangerous, he called, “Savu Tower, Tiger formation on Tiger frequency, are we cleared to commence live firing?”

“Tiger Formation cleared to fire, call rejoining on Tower frequency,” replied the excited tower controller, still enthralled by these unusual goings-on, in his airspace.

“Clear in live, Tiger 2,” Michael instructed, as he was happy it was safe to do so, once again having checked there were no boats or ships below.

“Tiger 2, turning in live,” Angela immediately responded in her rapid-fire excited voice.

Immediately, Delta’s nose turned down towards him, and Michael lost it for a short while, with its small front on profile and black against the dark sky. Then he could see it again, moving behind him, pulling in towards his six o’clock. Craning his head back to keep the Mirage in sight, he began to see its belly, as it closed menacingly and rapidly on the target. It had a lead angle, and just then, as he thought it should start firing, he saw flashes from the gun port. Almost immediately the firing ceased and the Mirage ducked out of sight below and behind. Looking forward, and up into his rear view mirror he saw Delta appear again on the other side, climbing steeply to the high perch on the right side.

“How did it go Angela?” Michael had to ask.

“It looked good Tiger 1,” answered Angela, remaining formal. “I think we know where to aim now. Tiger 2, turning in live again.” She was already back in position to begin her second attack.

“Clear in live Tiger 2,” Michael answered again, already looking forward to the next sortie when he would be firing. He hoped he would not shoot the target off again.

Each time Angela fired on her subsequent attacks on the target, Michael saw the gun flashes and tracer, but heard nothing. He had seen the same on Operation Gunboat, when the Delfin had fired and hit him. But this was different. These bullets were four times the size of the ones fired by the Delfin. The Fishbeds cannons were even larger and he hoped he would never see them firing at him. He shuddered at the thought of it.

When Hunty’s GPS indicated they were 100 nm north of Savu, Michael called, “Turning left, track 6,” as that was as far north as they had planned to go.

“Roger, Tiger 2 is sliding high,” Angela responded. She would fly the Mirage high above the Hunter doing a gentle turn back towards Savu. Michael made sure he only used a small amount of bank so that he would not cause any problems with the target behind him.

Once heading back south Michael called, “Tiger 2, you are cleared in live.” Looking up to his left, he saw Angela already in position.

Angela had made five passes when, on the sixth one, she suddenly called, “Gun empty, switches safe, rejoining for Savu. See you back there Michael, and thanks.”

“Roger Tiger 2. Switch to Savu tower,” answered Michael.

“Tiger 2 in,” Angela checked in and Michael was about to answer when the black Mirage shot passed, close to his right, in full afterburner. He could hear the roar, and then all he could see was the afterburner flame roaring out the rear of Delta’s jet pipe as it streaked ahead of him, becoming rapidly smaller as it accelerated away. He had jumped a bit with fright, it was so unexpected, but he shouldn’t have been surprised with his flamboyant aunt in the air.

“See ya!” Was all Angela said! She must have felt it had gone well!

“Have fun. Thanks for frightening the life out of me,” Michael responded, imagining Angela and Paul laughing in the Delta’s cockpit. Once again he looked forward to his next fight in the mighty Mirage which had almost disappeared in the distance as it accelerated towards Savu.

## Chapter

Once Michael had made sure to carefully position and drop the target just to the left of the runway, he landed and by the time he had come to a stop, the fire truck was returning to the jet fighters. Jordan was standing on the back of the truck, his thick, dark hair being tousled in the wind, as it sped towards the parked aircraft.

“23 hits Angela. Fantastic!” Paul beamed at his perspiring daughter standing alongside him, as they counted the hits on the flag that Jordan had thrown onto the ground. Angela was standing with her arms on her hips, legs astride, a high pony tail and the brightest sparkle in her dark eyes. The huge smile said it all.

“In the zone, Missy?” Michael said walking up to her, with hand held high. She gave him a high-5 followed by one with all the others.

“Your turn to beat us all Michael,” she laughed. “now that Jordan and I have done all the hard work!”

“I’ll try,” Michael said over the cheers of the islanders.

Paul quickly brought them down to earth. “I haven’t heard from my contact on the Rebel Island and I am a bit worried. I want a quick turnaround, so that we can have the aircraft ready and armed this evening, after Michael’s firing sortie,” Paul rapidly continued and they all rushed off to complete their tasks.

## Chapter

Michael knew his job was to refuel the jet fighters and tidy the cockpits. The engineers checked the aircraft while Paul, Angela and Jordan once more exchanged the gun pack on Delta with a rearmed one, and the practice bullets.

Once Michael had refuelled the aircraft and had adjusted the cockpit seat straps, he thought he would further help by doing the walk round checks on both jet fighters. They were both in perfect condition but he carried a rag to clean off any grease, dirt and mainly bugs that had hit the aircraft. When he came to the flare dispensers, attached to the outboard pylon of Delta's wings, he had another look at the cumbersome box-like fixtures that sat outboard of the supersonic fuel drop tanks. Michael was so familiar with everything on the Mirage and Hunter, but these had just been fitted, because of the infra-red Atoll missiles the Fishbeds carried. The idea was that if a Fishbed got a missile lock on the jet fighters' engines, the pilots could release the flares via a switch in the cockpit and with the intense infra-red source from the flares, the missile would follow them. Paul had stressed how important they could be and Michael made a special check of their security and the clearance of the holes that the flares would fall from, beneath the dispenser.

Once he was happy with both walk rounds, he hurried back and refitted his G suit and survival vest. He then felt himself begin to immediately perspire in the heavy clothing and mid-afternoon tropical heat, even with the sea breeze picking up from the north and the cloud overhead. He did not worry about any discomfort because he was about to fly the sleek Mirage next him. With its canopy raised, Tigers stripes and an imposing Tiger's head, it also appeared to be looking forward to flying again. Michael couldn't help himself as he patted Delta's fuselage, "Don't worry Delta we will be airborne soon and get good hits on the target." He looked around sheepishly, hoping no one had heard him talking to the jet fighter. Too late, Angela walked under the pointy nose of the Mirage. "Talking to Delta again, Michael," she smiled. Michael flushed bright red, and swept the hair from his forehead; but Angela just put a placating arm around him. "Never mind, little nephew, we have so much fun in these jet fighters, we all do it, even Dad!"

“Who mentioned me?” asked Paul as he and Jordan joined them.

“Nothing, Dad,” Angela said, keeping Michael from further embarrassment. “I was giving Michael some tips on the firing,” and gave Michael a conspiratorial wink, which he appreciated.

“Right Michael, I saw you do the walk rounds – thanks. Your turn to shoot,” Paul continued. “Just relax and aim in the front and centre.”

“Sure grandfather.”

“Jordan, your turn to tow the target in Hunty,” Paul said looking at his dark, good-looking nephew. Jordan did not appear too excited by another slow, boring tow. Angela picked up his apathy and said quickly, “I would love to do it.”

“You can let Angela fly Hunty,” Jordan said, looking as though he had been let off the hook. “You know how much she loves flying Hunty.”

“Are you sure Jordan; it is your turn?” Paul questioned, not understanding how anyone could turn down a flight in a jet fighter. Angela and Michael knew that Jordan just liked action.

“No, that’s fine, let her do it. I will sit in the cool tower, once I have attached the target to Hunty,” he responded, looking relieved.

“Okay,” Paul said and turned to Angela. “The same brief as the other gun firing sorties. Let’s strap in.” Then more to himself than to the others he said, “I’m still worried I have not been kept updated on the Fishbeds and the fishing boat that goes to Dolphin Bay. I must try and phone them as soon as we land.”

## Chapter

With that they walked to their respective cockpits. Andrew and Thomas climbed the steps to help Angela and Paul strap in, and Jordan walked with Michael to pass him his straps.

Michael and Jordan chatted while Michael strapped himself to the ejection seat. Finally, before giving Michael his helmets Jordan said, “As Paul instructed, you must relax Michael and you should score more than both of us.”

“Thanks Jordan, I will try.”

Soon all the steps and ground equipment were clear and the jets had started again. Delta’s canopy was closed and with the engine running Michael selected the air-conditioning on and immediately brought relief to himself and Paul.

Michael taxied Delta behind Angela in Hunty onto the taxiway, but a long way behind so that she could take off with the target before they arrived at the runway. He was a bit nervous again about the thought of firing at the flag, only because he hoped he would score and not shoot the target down again. However, his overriding feeling was once again that of the joy of being back in the Mirage. He loved the compact and well laid out cockpit, and the latent power that could be felt by the deep rumble of the powerful jet engine behind him. He tried to be smooth taxiing Delta with the brakes on the toe pedals, but it still bobbed a bit on its high undercarriage, another characteristic of the sleek jet fighter.

While Michael completed his Before Take Off Checks he heard Angela requesting take off clearance, then heard the roar of the Hunter as it began to move down the runway.

“Is your harness tight and are your ejection seat pins out grandfather?” Michael asked Paul on the intercom, completing his checks.

“Affirm, Michael.”

“Roger,” then on the radio he requested take off clearance from the tower.

“Cleared for take off Tiger 2, call rejoining and have fun,” answered the controller in the Tower who loved seeing the jet fighters fly as much as all the other islanders did.

They were soon screeching down the runway and Michael had a glimpse of Jordan waving from the fire truck. Then he was lifting off and turning low over the beach towards the north, following the Hunter which he could see climbing in the distance.

Michael deselected the afterburner, but even in full dry thrust the Mirage was able to very easily out climb the Hunter, especially as it was towing the target.

Both aircraft were soon above the sea haze of the lower levels and into the smooth air of the clear Pacific sky.

## Chapter

“Tiger 1 levelling at 15,000 feet heading 360 degrees. You are clear in live Tiger 2. Go for it Michael!” Angela called, giving Michael encouragement as they always did for each other.

“Roger, and thanks Tiger 1. We’ll call turning live!” replied Michael looking down at the beautiful black Hunter in the dolphin markings, against the backdrop of the deep blue ocean with the target hanging on behind.

As Michael flew Delta up abeam Hunty and 2000 feet above, he said over the intercom, “I am selecting the left gun with the ball ammunition, grandfather.”

“Good Michael, make sure the right, armed gun, is safe,” Paul answered. “You would hate to hit the target with the explosive rounds from the right gun; it would blow it to pieces.”

“Affirm,” was all that Michael said.

“Good, now just relax and remember our aiming point; front and centre, Michael!”

“Okay Grandfather-here we go!” Then he called to Angela over the radio, “Tiger 2 turning in live.”

“Clear in live, Tiger 2,” Angela replied.

With full dry thrust still selected Michael rolled right in a descending turn towards the target. As he reached right angles to the target, pointing at it, with the cross and the pipper on the target, he locked the gunsight to it with a button on the control column and immediately began a left, high G, turn to follow it. The cross shot out in front of the target with the pipper still on it, indicating he had a lead angle. It was looking good. He forced himself to slow his breathing and relax. The pipper was on the front third of the target, which was becoming large, very rapidly. He let the pipper slip back a bit. The angle was good. The picture looked right. He released the trigger on the control column and with his right forefinger pulled on it. The Mirage buffeted with the recoil of the firing gun and they watched the tracer rounds shooting into the flag. With the loud crashes in his ears, Michael released the trigger and eased under the flapping flag target, to the other side of it as it shot over the top of them and then pulled up towards a high key on Angela’s right.

“Great shoot Michael,” Paul said over the intercom. “The tracers were definitely going into the target.”

“Thanks grandfather, it did feel good, and I am sure I was more relaxed,” Michael replied, making the trigger safe and rolling out abeam the Hunter, looking down to position himself again for another attack.

“Just do exactly the same again, Michael,” Paul said.

“Roger,” then over the radio again, “Tiger 2, turning in live,” Michael said, and just as Angela should have answered there was another, very excited voice on the Tiger frequency, “Paul, Paul, this is Jordan – your

informant on Rebel Island has just phoned. The Fishbeds are airborne for Dolphin Island!”

“Slow down Jordan,” Paul answered trying to work out what was going on. “Why have we not heard from him before?”

Reverting to his more normal, composed voice, Jordan said, “His satellite phone was unusable, and he could not communicate and had to be careful whose phone to use.” Taking a breath, he continued, “The fishing boat left this morning and the Fishbeds took off ten minutes ago. They will be overhead Dolphin Island in 15 minutes. That means they will have 20 minutes loiter time before they have to return to Rebel Island to refuel.” (They had studied the Mig 21’s flight manual).

Paul replied, although he appeared to be talking to himself, “The fishing boat is obviously going to slaughter the Dolphins, with the Fishbeds overhead to protect it.” Then becoming more excited, he exclaimed, “they must have heard we have arrived in Savu. I wonder if they know that we are armed.”

A short silence followed on the radio. Angela was still heading north, towing the target and Michael in high key for his next shoot, had reduced power to maintain position. They were waiting for Paul to make a decision, and the silence was broken as Paul said, “we have to take them out now! I had expected at least another couple of days of practice, but we now know where the guns are firing, and we are ready!”

Michael felt an instant surge of excitement as he realised he would be in action again, and this time piloting the potent Mirage. In fact, he might have to protect Angela in the Hunter, which did not have the performance of the Mig 21 Fishbed. He also had a fleeting thought of how disappointed Jordan would be for giving up his turn to fly the Hunter.

## Chapter

Paul broke into his thoughts with orders for them all, “Angela, drop the target. You will remain Tiger 1,” he began. “I will navigate from the back

seat of Delta.” Looking down at the Hunter Michael saw the flag already falling towards the sea. I will never know how the shoot went he, ironically, found himself thinking.

“Roger, Tiger 2 position Patrol Battle Formation, port,” Angela began, acknowledging her position as leader. “Dad, give me a heading for Dolphin Island.”

“Wilco, Tiger 1,” answered Michael and realising, as he was sitting high on Angela’s starboard side, the best way to fly to his position was with a high barrel roll over the top of Hunty and let the nose drop on the downside. He immediately began the manoeuvre, pulling up and rolling left.

“Whoa, Michael; wasn’t there any easier way to get down there?” groaned Paul over the intercom as he battled the G, whilst trying to work out a heading for Angela steer for Dolphin Island.

“This is the quickest way grandfather,” Michael answered defensively, but also knowing Paul would have done the same – it was the way he had taught them to fly.

“Nice Michael,” said Angela as he rolled and dropped the Mirage into perfect Patrol Battle Formation, port side. “What heading Dad?” she continued, asking again for the direction.

“Tiger 1, steer heading 020 degree (NNE). It should only take about 10 minutes and therefore we should be there before the Fishbeds,” Paul answered after a short pause, checking the GPS in the rear cockpit. “Before going any further you must arm your guns. Michael, select the HE gun and Angela, you arm to fire all four of Hunty’s guns together,” he concluded.

They both acknowledged and Michael made the gun selection while watching the Hunter bank right for a short while then roll out again on the heading given to Angela by Paul. They had been flying north already, and just needed a small adjustment to be on course. Michael added thrust to

catch up abeam, and then called, “Tiger 1, tail clear,” as he began the air combat scan, while looking back, behind the Hunter.

“Tiger 2, tail clear,” Angela responded immediately, obviously doing exactly the same for Michael.

“Well done, both of you,” Paul called over the radio, pleased that his diligent young charges were immediately ready for an engagement. After another short while he continued, “Tiger 1, we have to be defensive. We cannot initiate the combat. That was the agreement with the Savu and Australian governments when they allowed us to arm the jet fighters. I suggest we Counter over Dolphin Island as you did on Operation Gunboat, until we are engaged by the Fishbeds. If they don’t arrive, we will harass the fishing boat until it departs.”

“Roger, Tiger 2. Reducing thrust and descending now to 5000 feet. We will pass over Dolphin Island heading NNE, which should be the direction of the approaching fishing boat and the Migs,” replied Angela, “and we will Counter at full dry thrust.”

“Wilco, Tiger 1,” confirmed Michael and then, “Tiger 1, tail clear!” He said watching the nose of Hunty lowering. He eased Delta’s nose forward and pulled back on the throttle to keep in formation.

“Tail clear, Tiger 2,” repeated Angela. “I have Dolphin Island in sight, and the fishing boat.”

They were descending through 10,000 feet and Michael looked forward and saw the green, coral island and recognised it from the photos he had seen.

“Got it,” said Michael.

“Levelling at 5000 feet,” called Angela. It was fairly smooth and as Angela applied thrust, Michael followed suit to stay in formation and glanced down to see they had an air speed of 450 knots. It would give them good performance in a fight. They roared over Dolphin Island with

its huge bay in which the fishermen murdered the dolphins, and then they were streaking towards the Rebel Island fishing boat.

“We will do a Counter before the boat in case they have weapons, Tiger 2,” called Angela.

“Roger,” Michael confirmed. Good idea, he thought, because they would be at an ideal height to be shot at, although going very fast.

“Tiger Formation, Counter starboard, go!” Angela ordered and Michael saw the Hunter snap into a 90 degree bank right turn. Michael crisply applied right bank, increased to dry thrust, pulled straight to 6 G, tensed up to stop from greying out. He heard the grunting from Paul in the back as he also fought the G.

“Losing you Tiger 2,” groaned Michael as he turned inside the Hunter.

“Visual, keep the turn going to track 6,” Angela said in a strained voice as she fought her own battles with the G and looking back, high over her right shoulder, at the under belly of the sleek Mirage which was turning inside her.

## Chapter

As Angela rolled the Hunter out, the Mirage was doing the same, and she immediately looked further back to the right, to check Michael’s ‘six’. A pale blue Mig 21 Fishbed was sitting behind Delta at 3 kilometres, the perfect distance to fire an Atoll infrared missile. Angela started to call the Break when she saw a yellow flame shoot out from behind the Fishbed and a missile launched out in front of it, trailing white smoke.

“Break right – no – missile Break right. Bogey your six and missile in the air!” “I’m sliding high,” shouted Angela. “There is a second bogey climbing up behind me,” she shrieked in alarm, as she saw the second Mig 21 come into her view.

Michael slammed the Mirage in a right, descending turn, pulled hard, then closed the throttle. Michael was attempting to turn the Mirage's tail and heat source away from the missile and by closing the throttle reduce the heat. Delta turned surprisingly well as Michael hauled on the control column up to 7 G. It was the most he had ever pulled - he was desperate to avoid the missile.

"I've got the missile Michael, it is locked on!" shouted Paul over the intercom, who was craning his head back, watching the missile homing in on them.

"Visual, visual," Michael shouted as he strained his head back as well and saw the white streak turning in towards them. "Dropping flares!" he continued and thumbed a button on the control column the engineers had rigged.

Still in the descending tight turn, Michael saw the missile passing above the flares and continue towards them.

"Fishbed 2 has switched to me Michael" Angela shouted again! "-- -- -- drop more flares Michael," Paul shrieked on the intercom, over Angela's radio call, as the missile closed on them.

Michael had already deployed more flares and there was a massive explosion behind them as the missile exploded in the falling flares.

"Well done Michael, can you see the bogey?" called a very relieved Paul over the intercom. Once again Michael had already been looking back and saw the menacing nose of the pale blue Fishbed in their six and closing fast – but he could not see its belly. At that instant he saw it launch another missile. "He has launched again!" But almost immediately saw the missile veer off. "No lock, no lock – the missile has departed – it is outside its firing parameters – the Mig has no more missiles," Michael shouted over the radio and applied full dry thrust, then full afterburner and used the thrust to pull towards the Fishbed, which was still closing for a gun shot, but going too fast to get a lead angle on them.

“My bogey has fired a missile, it also departed,” Angela shrieked, then with a rising voice, “and another, it has also departed, but he is closing for guns. I am still in the turn. I have you visual below,” she added, continuing her commentary.

“Their energy is low,” Paul suddenly broke into the chatter. “They think we are still unarmed and cannot defend ourselves and are engaging for guns!”

“He is sliding through,” Michael called, watching the Fishbed’s nose pointing at them. It was trying to bring its guns to bear, but began sliding through Delta’s six. He was fixated on getting a shot, but with too much speed.

Michael had to make a huge decision; continue the break or reverse! The Fishbed had been more than 30 degrees off and sliding through quite fast! It disappeared out of view behind them. He would do it! He would reverse! Still in full afterburner, he unloaded, rolled rapidly the opposite way and pulled, immediately looking out to the left. The Mig was slipping past them. It began to slide high in a high yo-yo, to convert energy into height and slowdown, but it was too late. As it moved out ahead of them it began to break downwards towards them, realising Michael was moving into its six, and trying to reduce angles for a gun shot. It was too late for the Mig. Michael had rolled Delta towards the Fishbed and was positioning the gunsight onto it.

Looking through the gunsight he put the pipper on the mid-fuselage and locked the gunsight to it. It was now 400 metres ahead of them; ideal for a gunshot and as it continued its turn the Mig’s highly swept wing plan form filled the gun sight. The gun sight’s cross shot out ahead, where the guns were aiming and giving a lead angle. Michael had to track two seconds to compute a firing solution, which seemed like, forever. He was surprisingly relaxed. He dropped the trigger on the control column and fired. The Mirage recoiled as the gun hammered away, unleashing its deadly load. Tracers reached out in a curve for the Mig and almost immediately Michael could see hits on the bogey where the pipper was aiming, just behind the pilot, followed by the Mig breaking up in mid air.

## Chapter

Fearing flying into the debris, Michael stopped firing, pulled up hard and rolled away from the disintegrating Fishbed. It had all taken just seconds and appeared to Michael to have been flown in radio silence. But then all of a sudden the voices came rushing back.

“Well done Michael. Extremely well done – great shooting!” Paul was exclaiming with elation over the intercom. But then the panicked shriek of Angela broke over the radio. “Tiger 2, Michael, I am in a defensive yo-yo with this Mig. I have countered once, but have not got enough thrust, without an afterburner,” she said rushing her words. “I think when he comes down this time he will have a shot!”

“Where are you Tiger 2?” she concluded.

Michael and Paul were both scanning the sky. “They are above us, high ten o’clock Michael, turning left,” Paul said anxiously over the intercom, worried about his daughter.

“Visual, visual Angela,” Michael called. “We are in your low three o’clock. I see him closing in on you.” Taking a breath he continued, “I have good energy (as he was still in full afterburner) keep the left turn going and I will tell you to Break; then break hard left and down.”

“Quickly Michael, he is almost in firing range, but I can’t see his belly yet,” Angela answered in a less strident voice, realising help was on the way.

Michael continued accelerating up towards the battling jet fighters and he cut the corner of the circle to close quicker on the surviving Fishbed. Seeing this, Paul said, as calmly as he could over the intercom, “Don’t cut in too much Michael or you might find yourself in a square corner and overshoot.”

“Thanks grandfather,” Michael answered and eased slightly out of the turn. He had been too intent on the kill. He was closing nicely; at 1000 metres out he put the cross on the Mig, and then locked the gunsight to it. Holding the pipper on the Fishbed, as they closed on it, the cross shot out in front and the G came on. Michael felt them beginning to slide through and overshoot, and pulled harder on the control column holding the pipper on the Fishbed. The Mirage had so much drag with its delta platform that the speed came off and he began to comfortably track the Mig. “I need 2 seconds,” he said to himself for the gunsight tracking time.

“Now Michael, now – he is firing!” Angels shrieked again. “I have been hit!”

“Break right, break right!” Michael shouted back, still holding the pipper on the Mig. The Hunter dropped out of view. He released and dropped the trigger. The Fishbed saw him too late and began pulling towards them. Michael fired with the pipper on the mid-fuselage. Once again the Mirage vibrated and clattered from the firing cannon, and the tracer bullets clawed their way to the Fishbed. Bits began to fly off the top of the fuselage and almost immediately the canopy shot off and the pilot ejected. Michael was further back when he fired this time and was able to evade the debris quite easily by sliding high above the now, exploding Mig.

“He is gone Angela,” Michael said with relief. “How are you?”

“Fantastic Michael,” she replied. “I can’t see you, but I can see two parachutes in the air. Hunty is flying alright but I can see two bullet holes in the outer, starboard wing. I don’t think the Fishbed was tracking because I could not see his belly, but he fired anyway, for a fly-through and managed a couple of lucky hits.”

“I’ve got you visual Angela,” Michael said seeing the Hunter in a gentle right turn around the two descending parachutes and smoke coming from two spots on the ocean where the Fishbeds had crashed.

“Roll out, and we will come alongside to check the damage.” Michael banked left, nose down, increased thrust and rushed towards the black Hunter now flying straight in level about 5000 feet above the ocean.

“Which side Tiger 1?” Michael asked, suddenly realising she had not told him. “Right side, Tiger 2,” Michael flicked slightly right. He was handling the Mirage positively, and with a lot of confidence. He moved neatly into echelon starboard and Paul said over the intercom, “move up into line abreast Michael, I want a closer look.”

“Sure Grandfather!”

Angela’s visor was up, but even with her oxygen mask still on he could see the anxiety on her face.

“Drop below Hunty, Michael, I want to see where the rounds have come out.” Michael eased Delta down and also had a quick glance at the bullet holes in the outer parts of the black, swept wing.

“No problem, my girl,” Paul said over the radio. “There is nothing there that could be damaged, and no fuel tank,” he said once again with relief. “I once saw a Hunter take a SAM (surface to air missile) through that part of the wing, in the War. It did not explode, left a huge hole and the Hunter flew home without a problem.”

“Yeeees!” was all Angela said, then, “Michael you did it!” she shouted and he could see her smiling eyes as he was still flying next to her, in formation.

Then they were all trying to congratulate each other; Paul, Angela, Jordan and Michael. The relief that they had survived and been successful again was evident. Paul brought a bit of sanity into the radio chatter. Shouting to be heard he said, “That’s enough for now, we will de-brief on the ground. Angela, you fly back to Savu at a reasonably slow speed and land – Andrew and Thomas can then make a proper assessment of the damage. Michael, I think we need to deal with the fishing boat.”

“Roger Dad,” Angela answered first and the Hunter turned gently away from them and back towards the South, and Savu.

## Chapter

The Mirage was north of Dolphin Island and Michael rolled Delta, back towards the Island where they had last seen the fishing boat.

“There it is Michael” said Paul on seeing the boat first. “They have stopped to pick up the pilots.”

“I see them grandfather. What should I do to them?” asked Michael.

The fishing boats had stopped between them and the Island and they could see a small Zodiac speedboat moving away from it, obviously to pick up the downed pilots.

“I think some very high speed passes might deter them from slaughtering any more dolphins. If they fire on us, take them out.” Paul was still on adrenalin high and obviously felt it was a good time to deal with them for good.

“Roger Grandfather!” Michael replied with the excitement rising in him again. He lowered the nose of the Mirage towards the deep blue ocean below, selected full dry thrust, then afterburner – to full afterburner. The sleek jet fighter shot forward, and the acceleration pushed them back into their seats. Looking down Paul saw they were rapidly approaching the speed of sound. “Michael, I once did a 10 metres high pass in the air force, very close to Mach 1. The moving shock waves made the Mirage porpoise a bit – beware of it!” Paul cautioned over the intercom.

“Thanks grandfather,” Michael answered, welcoming the input, then continued, “hold tight, here we go!”

Michael aimed the first pass at the Zodiac still picking up the second pilot. He had full afterburner and felt the eerie silence of supersonic flight. A quick glance down and he saw they were doing Mach 1.2. He

concentrated on the zodiac, easing Delta down until he felt it becoming uncomfortably close. The Mirage began to rock slightly up and down as Paul had expected, but easily controllable. They flashed just metres above the boat and his last image was of people diving into the sea.

Pulling up he levered the throttle out of afterburner into full dry power, and hauled back on the control column to 6 G, so he did not climb too high and far away, with the excessive speed they had.

“Wow Michael, that was close,” Paul said, obviously releasing the breath he had been holding.

“Don’t worry grandfather, we were just as low on Tiger Island,” said Michael almost nonchalantly. “I’m getting used to it.”

“That must have terrified them,” Paul replied looking down from 5000 feet at the seamen and pilots climbing back into the zodiac.

“I see we still have 15 minutes of fuel left before ‘bingo’ and our return to Savu. We will circle overhead at this level until they are back on the fishing boat. If they leave the Island, we will let them go. But if they continue to Dolphin Island or fire at us, we will take them out,” Paul said again, with finality.

“Okay grandfather,” Michael replied. “I haven’t seen any weapons or gun flashes because we are at the ideal height to be fired upon.”

“We’ll see,” concluded Paul and the cockpit went quiet as Michael continued to bank in a large, slow orbit around the fishing boat.

“Tiger 2, Tiger 1 has landed safely,” said Jordan breaking the radio silence from Savu.

“Thank goodness,” Paul said over the intercom, sounding very relieved. “Thanks Jordan; we are just waiting to see what the fishing boat does before we return to Savu,” Paul continued over the radio.

“Look grandfather, the pilots are still climbing aboard and the boat is beginning to move and turn towards the Rebel Island,” Michael declared, not sure whether he was happy or not. Part of him wanted to sink the fishing boat for what they wanted to do to the dolphins and for the Migs attacking them.

“They must be desperate to get away, because they have even left the zodiac behind in the water,” Paul laughed over the intercom. “Between you shooting down both the Migs and that beat up, I don’t think they will sleep for weeks.”

As they orbited overhead they watched the boat steam away from Dolphin Island. It was travelling as fast as it could, the funnel belching black diesel and with a bow wave larger than it had probably ever produced before. Paul suddenly broke the silence again. “Give them a parting shot Michael. I want you to fly low towards the rear of the boat and fire off both guns. I think the old naval warning tradition of ‘firing a shot across the bows’ might ensure they will never be back, but fire behind it and that will speed them on their way.”

“Good idea Grandfather,” replied Michael, feeling much better and already turning in towards the fleeing fishing boat.

“Arming both guns, Grandfather?” Michael confirmed.

“My word Michael, and fire them to empty, in one burst!” Paul answered. “We won’t need any more ammunition on this flight.”

“Roger,” said Michael, applying full dry thrust. He was at right angles to the fishing boat, still accelerating in a shallow descent. He selected the ground attack mode of the gunsight and aimed just to the left of the wake of the boat. He had never made a ground attack before and as if Paul was reading his thoughts he said over the intercom, “Aim a little high above the target Michael, and once you start firing, lower the pippin as you approach closer. That will take care of the gravity drop, far out.”

“Thanks grandfather,” Michael replied and concentrated on the attack. He put the pipper just ahead of the wake and when it felt right, dropped the trigger and pulled firmly with his right forefinger. The hammering of both 30 mm canons was initially alarming to Michael. As the guns continued to pound away, he began lowering the pipper watching the tracer curving away from them. Then he saw the rounds hitting the sea just behind the fishing boat. Some were just high splashes of the practice rounds but also the eruptions of the high explosive rounds, which he had used to shoot down the Fishbeds. Then there came an abrupt halt, firstly from one gun and then the second, as they ran out of ammunition. The silence was eerie. As they moved closer to the gunboat, Michael banked hard and low across the front of the boat. The fishing boat seemed to slow for a short while but then shot forward again, appearing to be going even faster than before.

“I think the dolphins will be safe now Michael. It will be a long while before the Rebel fishermen will be back, if ever,” Paul said, sounding elated. “Great shoot grandson. You have made the very best of your opportunities – none of us could have done better today. Well done mate!”

“Thanks grandfather,” Michael replied sheepishly and embarrassed. It was a high accolade from his step – grandfather.

“Now let’s go and beat up Savu,” Paul said breaking the necessary melodrama.

“Too right Grandfather!” said Michael feeling excited again; applying full dry thrust, then afterburner, and turning and climbing southwards over Dolphin Island for Savu. A final look down at the dolphin bay with its beautiful, white beach and Michael felt good about what they had achieved to protect the beautiful, strong but gentle creatures.

## Chapter

The Mirage was climbing nearly vertical, in full afterburner, and to level off Michael rolled Delta inverted, at 15,000 feet. Once straight and level, he rolled upright.

“Nice Michael,” Paul said on the intercom, “I am pleased you use the versatility of these jet fighters. You all do.”

“We try Grandfather; it is just the best fun.” Then changing to the Savu radio frequency Michael called, “Savu Tower, Tiger 2 rejoining, request a break from the north?”

“Tiger 2, Savu Tower you are once more cleared for a break from the north, low level. Congratulations!” The island controller had heard of the Migs being shot down and was looking forward to seeing the Mirage at close quarters again, after such a successful flight.

Savu was soon in sight and about the time Michael should have begun his descent he continued in the cruise.

“Shouldn’t we descend Michael?” Paul asked.

“I owe Angela one,” replied Michael.

“Owe Angela one what, Michael?” Paul asked, not understanding at all.

“You’ll see grandfather. Just hang on again!”

They flew high over Savu, so they could not be heard or seen, and once on the south side, Michael rolled the Mirage inverted and pulled down to increase the speed quickly – just like the final part of a loop, but he did not level off and dived for the airport with full dry thrust. The speed shot up and he monitored it to ensure they did not go supersonic. The speed reached 600 knots and he reduced the thrust to hold it there.

He could see Hunty on the apron and aimed for it, hoping Angela was still there checking the battle damage.

“She is going to kill you Michael,” said Paul with a chuckle, realising who he was aiming for.

“She’ll have to catch me first, Grandfather,” Michael said still concentrating on the low level beat up.

When they were 30 seconds out Jordan called over the radio, “Tiger 2, where are you?” He was obviously still looking to the north where they said they would be coming from. As he finished speaking Michael zoomed Delta over Hunty from the south and just next to the tower.

“Here!” He said and pulled up high for a huge wing over onto Downwind with the throttle closed and the speed brake out.

A moment later Jordan came on air, “You little buzzard, you scared the life out of us – well done! Angela is waving her fist at you!”

“Good! Tiger 2, positioning right downwind for Runway 32,” Michael replied. Then over the intercom to Paul, once they were out to sea, “I’m going to drop the remaining flares, grandfather.”

“Go-ahead Michael, it should look great, and we won’t need them now,” answered Paul.

“Call Final,” said the Tower Controller, still laughing from the fright he had obviously received.

They were high over the Bay and almost inverted when Michael began dropping the flares, one at a time.

“That looks fantastic Michael,” said Jordan over the radio.

Angela had done a spectacular barrel roll on Operation Tigers, and Michael was doing something similar, but much larger. That was because he wanted to drop the flares out to sea where the falling debris would not hurt anyone, and also, without flaps the Mirage was not as forgiving as the Hunter if he made an error, pulling high G, inverted, close to the ground. In the end Michael rolled out onto Downwind at a circuit height of 1500 feet and selected gear down with power going on.

With the confidence he was flying the Mirage, the circuit and landing was no problem, and he even remembered not to deploy the brake parachute which they did not need on the very long Savu runway. He had concentrated on the approach and landing, but was looking forward to the celebration on the apron with the family and engineers. Michael slowed Delta and was about to turn off the runway when Paul talked for the first time, “Well done Michael. It was great to just sit in the back and watch it all unfold.”

“Thanks grandfather. I am pleased I was in the right place at the right time and did not foul it up!” responded Michael.

“Said like true jet fighter pilot,” Paul laughed over the intercom.

Michael taxied the Mirage to where Thomas was marshalling them and there was a crowd gathering, plus the villagers behind the security fence, who did not look at all alarmed. In fact, they seemed to be even more joyous after Michael’s surprise fly-by.

Michael had soon stopped Delta and shut down. With the engine clattering to a stop Paul and Michael inserted their ejection seat pins and then descended their respective steps together.

Angela, Jordan, the engineers and the ground handlers were all cheering and clapping. They could also hear the islanders applauding and waved to them before being engulfed by the others, at the bottom of the steps.

It was Angela who first embraced Michael, after he had removed his helmet. She enveloped him in a huge hug, and Michael could tell she was crying, hardly believing it from his strong willed aunt.

“Thanks mate, you saved my life!” she said with emotion, as she released him.

“No worries!” responded Michael, nervously sweeping the hair that had fallen across his brow, embarrassed and trying to be flippant.

With one final hug she released and pushed him away, then punched him on the shoulder, “that’s for terrifying me, and everyone else here!” They all burst out laughing together and the islander cheers could be heard above the rest. They all waved at them and the revelry continued for some time.

## Chapter

Then it was time to refuel the jet fighters and cover them for the night. First though, they went to inspect the bullet holes on Hunty’s outer, starboard wing. They had gone clear through the wing without damaging anything, although the bent metal made it look very dramatic.

“You were very lucky, my girl,” Paul said to Angela as they were huddled around the damaged Hunter. “If it had hit in the fuselage, one 37mm rounds could have brought you down.”

“True Dad, but that was a lucky hit, because he never tracked me,” Angela corrected her father.

“Very true, very true,” acknowledged Paul, pleased once again that one of his young, confident charges was standing up for herself. “You flew very well Angela, especially as Hunty has a lot less power than a Mig 21.”

“Quite right grandfather,” added Michael who had overheard the conversation, “and great commentary and control Angela,” Michael continued, feeling very much part of the team. Paul nodded and smiled while Angela put an arm around Michael’s shoulders.

After confirming with Thomas and Andrew that they could make temporary repairs on the Hunter, the pilots did all the work putting their ‘beloved’ jet fighters to bed. They cleaned and refuelled the aircraft, put covers on the canopies, locks on the undercarriages and blanks in the engine intakes and jet pipes.

## Chapter

It was dark when all their tasks were at last complete. The islanders had long retired to their homes when the pilots and engineers collected around the truck that would take them to their resort hotel.

“Well done, all of you,” Paul addressed them, and then turning to the pilots, continued, “You will return to Launceston in the morning. I will stay with Andrew and Thomas and arrange to carry all the ground equipment back in a ship, later in the day. Angela, you fly your favourite, Hunty. Michael, you fly in Delta’s back seat, and Jordan, as you lost out on the action, you fly Delta and lead the formation.”

Jordan was normally fairly quiet, but had appeared as excited as everyone else after the action that day, however was now very serious. “I would prefer that Michael flew Delta and led the formation,” he started. “I have been selective in the flying I chose, and only wanted the action. By doing so and not doing my turn flying and towing with Hunty, I lost out on the dogfight.”

Michael was about to protest, but Paul cut him off, “Good on you Jordan, your turn will come,” pleased that Jordan was not bitter about losing out on the fight, but learning from his selfishness and showing maturity.

They drove back to the resort and had a rather subdued dinner. They had come down off their adrenalin high and mainly talked about the tactics of the fight. They decided that they had worked well together, but also very lucky that the Fishbeds had thought they were unarmed, otherwise they would not have been so bold in their attack. Hunty would definitely have suffered in a more sustained fight, with the lack of an afterburner.

Exhausted, they were about to go to bed when Paul said, “we will have to see if we have at last broken the Rebel Islanders’ spirit or whether they will acquire more jet fighters. If they do we will do whatever we have to, to be ready for them. We will always have fun in Hunty and Delta, and the flying we continue to do will keep us sharp.”

“You had better have a good sleep Grandfather; you were grunting and groaning in the back during the fight, and I could hear your bones creaking

as we pulled G!” Michael piped in, already jumping out of his seat to get away from his laughing grandfather, who was trying to give him a friendly clip. Angela and Jordan joined in the laughter.

## Chapter

The next morning they were up early and still fairly quiet because they had a lot to do before getting airborne for home.

Once they were ready to fly, Michael’s Brief to Angela and Jordan was simple; “we will do exactly as we did after Operation Tigers – a formation take off on RW14, with the wind that is blowing, turn left and then into Attack Battle Formation for a beat up over the runway. We will pull up into the vertical for a couple of twinkle rolls followed by a join up in Patrol Battle Formation for Tasmania.

With a final wave to the group of loyal islanders, they strapped in and were soon airborne for a repeat of their previous high speed departure from Savu for Tasmania. After all that had happened the day before, it was a bit of an anti-climax; if flying supersonic jet fighters could ever be called that.

After completing their vertical rolls following the fly-by, Michael called Savu Tower, “Tiger Formation to Brisbane Centre, thank you and good bye.”

”Roger, Tiger Formation, call Paul Brisbane Centre,” answered the Savu Controller, then in a more serious voice, “you must realise how much we people of Savu appreciate your defence of our Islands. We consider you citizens of Savu and you will always be honoured guests of ours.” Finishing off on a lighter note, “and you will always be welcome with fly-bys like that – fantastic as always!”

Michael sat up a bit straighter and felt how fortunate they were to be able to defend the people of this poor, island nation and bring them enjoyment by doing the things they loved, flying these magnificent jet fighters to their extremes.

“Thank you; you are very welcome. Tiger formation go to Brisbane Centre,” Michael farewelled on the radio.

## Chapter

Once free from the ground, and the oppressive heat and humidity, they were soon into the clear blue sky over the Pacific Ocean. Whilst being cooled by the aircraft air conditioning, their good spirits returned, especially after the spoken gratitude from the Tower Controller. They were back in their element. Angela seemed to say, over the Tiger radio frequency, what they were all thinking, “it doesn’t get any better!” Michael and Jordan smiled in agreement.

They had just settled down in the cruise back to Launceston when the Tiger Frequency burst into life.

“Tiger 1, this is Sheekan,” called Paul, in a voice of rising excitement.

“Sheekan, Tiger 1, go-ahead,” answered Michael recovering from the sudden, loud and intense radio call.

“The Australian Air Force had just phoned to say they have an F/A 18 Hornet flying from their base in New South Wales to Melbourne,” continued Paul. “It is going to do a Flypast at the Australia Day ceremony. When I told them where you were, the Squadron Commander asked if the Hornet pilot could intercept you two, for some dogfight practice.” (Fighter pilots always like to fight against other, different jet fighters, so that they can compare their performance).

Paul knew the Hornet Squadron pilots well as he always flew Hunty in bright red F1 colours, in formation with a Hornet, at the Melbourne Grand Prix.

“That sounds great Jordan?” Michael asked Jordan over the intercom. “What do you think?”

“Of course, it will be fantastic. It will be our first fight against a Hornet,” answered Jordan immediately, reacting the way any jet fighter pilot would.

“Tiger 2, Tiger 1, are you up for a fight?” he asked Angela on the Tiger Frequency.

“Of course!” she replied with enthusiasm.

“In that case, Tiger 2, do you want to lead?” asked Michael knowing how challenging the fight would be against a high-performance fourth-generation, fly-by-wire jet fighter. It had so much more power and control than the Hunter or Mirage.

“Negative, Michael,” Angela answered quickly. “You are more than capable, especially after yesterday!”

“That’s right,” said Jordan over the intercom. “You will do fine, and I will be able to help with the lookout.”

“Sheekan, Tiger 1, we would be delighted to take on a Hornet,” said Michael sounding more confident than he felt. He could not remember having trained for this, and would rely on his instinct which had held him in good stead against the Rebel Fighters in Operations Gunboat, Tigers and the previous day over Dolphin Island.

“Good, Tiger 1, I have already cleared it with Brisbane ATC.” Paul had anticipated his confident, young pilots would accept the challenge. “They have indicated no traffic for you below 40,000 feet. I have told the Hornet pilot it is pointless to use his BVR (beyond visual range) radar and missiles against you. So, he will only claim gun camera kills, as that is all you can achieve. He is agreeable. Good luck and give him blazes!” Paul concluded with confidence.

“Sheekan, Tiger 2 here,” Angela interjected. “Tell him, without his fancy toys he might have to pull a bit of G today!” Angela was referring to the modern use of the BVR radar and missiles. The modern air battle could be fought without even becoming visual with the enemy aircraft.

“Is that so Tiger 2?” A new voice came on the air. “Tiger 1, this is Hornet 1. I am being radar vectored to your position. I will try not to ‘grey out’ in the fights,” he said with reference to Angela’s comment.

“Hornet 1, Tiger 1, we will see about that!” Michael then realised he was in charge of the air battle and as such had to establish Rules of Combat in order that the engagements were safe.

“Tiger 2 and Hornet 1, the standard Rules of Combat apply. ‘Hard deck’ is 5000 feet. ‘Rabbit’ call if anyone loses the other aircraft and feels unsafe— we go wings level until visual – then resume the fight. The first one to ‘Bingo’ fuel, and we stop the fight.”

“Are there any questions?” Michael asked firmly. (‘Hard Deck’ meant sea level would be 5000 feet above the sea, so that even in the event of a mistake they would not crash into the sea. But if someone broke the ‘Hard deck’ at 5000 feet he/she would call ‘Rabbit’ and they would restart the fight. ‘Bingo’ fuel was the minimum fuel needed to return to base).

“Good brief, Michael!” Jordan called over the intercom.

“Thanks Jordan, I am descending to 20,000 feet. My guess is that will be the best altitude for us to fight the Hornet,” Michael said, encouraging Jordan’s advice from his experience, as he moved the throttle back a bit and lowered the nose to keep the speed up as they descended. Looking across, he saw Angela doing the same. Michael quite rightly realised that by descending to a lower level their controls would be more effective, and the thicker air over their wings would help them turn better. The Hornet, with its fly-by-wire controls and enormous engine thrust, could easily outperform them at any altitude. Therefore they had to be at a height which would best suit them.

In the minds of Michael, Jordan and Angela they knew they would probably be ‘shot down’ by the far superior Hornet, but with their mutual support they would do their best to keep him off their tails.

“Tail clear, Tiger 2,” Michael called, beginning their combat clearance calls, and looking as far back behind Hunty as possible.

“Tail clear, Tiger 2,” was Angela’s immediate response, obviously also having started watching his ‘six’.

“Good work Michael,” Jordan continued to give him confidence, over the intercom. “I will let you initiate all sighting calls unless I see him first. I will then give the Hornet’s position, but you control the fight,” Jordan continued.

Michael levelled Delta at 20,000 feet and increased the thrust to hold 400 knots. Looking across, the Hunter was right in position, 3 kilometres on the beam. They were in a good position to start the fight.

“Tail clear, Tiger 1,” came Angela’s tension filled voice. She was right back in the ‘zone’. The call was encouraging, and reassuring.

Michael looked past Hunty, and towards the rear and was about to call tail clear, when he saw the menacing, pointed nose of a blue/grey Hornet. It was climbing and closing rapidly from below, for a gun kill on Hunty!

“Break Right, Tiger 2, bogey your six, low and menacing!” Michael screamed on the radio. “I’m turning right and sliding high!”

Michael saw the Hunter slam into a right turn, away from him, with the nose going down. Michael lit the afterburner.

As expected, Angela had pulled tight in the Break, trying to make it difficult for the Hornet to track. It was turning in tightly behind the Hunter at a rate that alarmed Michael and Jordan. The fly-by-wire was amazing. The Hornet just rotated. When they thought he would call a kill, the Hornet broke off and turned up towards them in Delta. He must have been very worried by the Mirage coming in behind him. Michael made a quick decision as he saw the Hornet start climbing rapidly, and turning towards them.

“Tiger 2, keep the right Break going. Roll out Tracks 6, full thrust. I will be coming down abeam, on your right side, in Patrol Battle Formation,” Michael called, trying not to race his words.

Hauling the nose down, with full afterburner, at 6G to follow the Hunter, both Michael and Jordan were groaning as they fought against the effects of G. Michael had increased the angle toward the Hornet and as they passed almost nose to nose, it had no chance of a gunshot.

As Angela rolled Hunty out on the reverse heading, ‘Track 6,’ Michael was bringing Delta out on her right side, deselecting the afterburner so he would not accelerate passed her.

“Tiger 1, visual, tail clear,” Angela called immediately as Michael dropped Delta in beside her. It was a good confident call, and a relief to Michael because, although he realised, to follow them, the Hornet should have been going too fast with huge angles to make, he was not quite sure how well it could turn. He was just so pleased Angela had confirmed it was not on his tail.

“Tail clear, Tiger 2, Counter left, go,” called Michael “Roll out ‘Track 12’”. That was so they could resume their flight towards Tasmania. Michael pulled hard behind the Hunter and as he started losing it under his nose, called, “losing you, Tiger 2.”

“Visual, Tiger 2,” Angela called almost immediately, groaning and she pulled 5 G and looking back for the Mirage. In the Counter the Hunter used full thrust and the Mirage, full dry thrust; also pulling 5G. It was a really tight turn.

They rolled out abeam one another and gave their tail clear calls. Michael realised they had been very defensive on their first encounter, but he was just getting the feel of the Hornet. At least he had not been able to split them.

No sooner had they settled down on the beam, when Angela shrieked over the radio, “break left, Tiger 1, bogie in your six, 1 kilometre. I am sliding high” That was close! The Hornet must have pulled up from below again.

Michael slammed the control column to the left, pulled back hard, rolling the nose down, while selecting full dry thrust, then afterburner - light off – then straight to full afterburner. The turn rate improved markedly as the thrust increased. He and Jordan were both grunting again in the high G.

“Reverse nose high, bogey has switched to me,” Angela said her voice a bit calmer, with the threat not so imminent. “I will be in your high two o’clock.” Then the pitch increasing again and she shouted, “No! Break left again, he has switched back to you!”

The Hornet was doing what they did in 2 versus 1 flying against Donald in his two-seater Hunter, Bunty. He was trying to put them out of sight of one another. Michael just hoped Angela had not slid too high. In that case, if the Hornet had brought his speed down, he would have had time to shoot him down before Angela could come down to help, and also giving the Hornet time to escape.

Michael should not have worried about Angela, because, as usual, she was spot on. She kept the commentary going because Michael could not see the Hornet immediately.

“He’s right behind us Michael!” groaned Jordan, as he looked back. Still pulling hard in the descending break, Michael strained his head back. The ademahr was screaming amber/read in the cockpit. He could just see the Hornet closing fast on them, but it did not have a lead angle.

“Tiger 1, he is staying with you. I’m coming down in his six. Keep the Break going. He is about 600 metres behind you, with the high overtake.”

Michael could still see the Hornet as he strained, looking over his left shoulder.

“He is breaking out! Reverse nose high and he should be in your high two o’clock!” called an elated Angela. Michael kept the pull going, applied right rudder and the Mirage began to roll right with the nose high. He moved the control column slowly to the right to further increase the rate of turn.

Michael looked up in his two o’clock position. There it was! The light, grey underside of the Hornet, flying nose high against the darker sky, its jet pipes lit up bright orange in afterburner. He had to be using all the thrust those two, powerful jet engines could muster.

“He is too high and fast to follow Angela. Jinx me left for a tail clear,” Michael said, looking up to ensure the Hornet was no threat. He had considered going after him, as both of them were behind him. But the Hornet had too much energy and power, and they could have been suckered, the same as Jordan had done to the Albatross on Tiger Island.”

“Jinx left,” ordered Angela, following Michael’s instruction. Michael stopped the climb, rolled hard left, dropped out of afterburner into full dry thrust. “Roll out! I am in your left 9 o’clock, level,” Angela continued. “Tail clear!”

“Visual! Tail clear,” answered Michael watching the Hunter drop into perfect Patrol Battle Formation, next to him.

“Well done Michael,” Jordan said, sounding a lot more animated than normal. “We nearly went after him,” he continued, not really completing his sentence as if he had never expected to go offensive against a Hornet. “Keep it up, it’s going so well!”

Their tail clear calls were now given with almost bravado. The next fight would probably be the last. The afterburner used a lot of fuel. It would be a tough one.

Michael was looking down at his speed when Jordan shouted, “Bogie, right, six o’clock.” There he was again, almost out of nowhere. Michael

could see the Hornet 600 metres behind Hunty. The Hornet was much slower – he wanted the ‘kill’!

“Break left, hard, Tiger 2! The bogey is in your six, almost in gun range,” shouted Michael. “I am sliding high.”

“Reverse, nose high. The bogey has switched to me,” continued Michael watching the nose of the Hornet rising away from the Hunter, and rolling towards them.

The Hornet was much slower and sliding in behind the Mirage. Michael also saw the Hunter’s nose rising and rolling towards them. Michael was about to break down towards Angela in Hunty, as he had done previously, when the Hornet’s nose reversed away from him and back down to the Hunter.

“Break left – he is turning back behind you! Keep the nose level, Tiger 2!” Michael yelled.

By constantly switching between the Hunter and Mirage the Hornet pilot was trying to keep Michael climbing away from the fight and Angela descending – therefore splitting them. At the Hornet’s slower speed, with the incredible fly-by-wire control and massive engine thrust, he would have enough time to eventually fly up and shoot Michael before Angela could pull up to help. With that excess thrust he could then possibly go down and shoot her, before she could escape.

“Reverse right, nose high, he is coming back to me. No, no! Break left, he is back to you. Reverse right, he is back with me,” Michael continued the commentary, relieved that Angela was following his every command without hesitation or question. There was slight pause. Then he shouted, “He is staying with me. He is coming after me! He is coming after me!” he repeated. “Keep the turn going and climbing. I should come out high in your 2 o’clock position,” Michael called, his voice pitch rising, watching the Hornet’s nose rotating rapidly, for a gun kill, unlike any other fighter he had seen. It was the fly-by-wire control and massive thrust. He was willing Angela to see them and help.

“Visual! Visual!” shouted Angela at last. It was the first time she had actually seen the Hornet in this engagement. “I have got you – the bogey is closing fast on you!” Angela shrieked. “He is too high for me to come up. I will try!” she continued in her high pitched voice, still thinking aggressively.

“I still have you visual,” Michael called. “Keep the right turn going. I am Breaking down, left and will cross above and over you, to be abeam you, on your left side.” Michael pulled down hard, still turning, going into full afterburner.

The ademahr was screaming amber/red again, but with the surge of thrust the turn rate was phenomenal. He must have a tough time tracking us through this, Michael thought as he tensed himself, instinctively in the turn.

“He is sliding through our six, Michael. He must have been just too slow,” Jordan grunted over the intercom. “He can’t fire!”

Michael looked down to see the Hunter flying underneath them, through to their right side. As he had instructed, Angela was still in the right turn.

“Tiger 2, roll out, roll out! Unload, full thrust!” Michael kept a running commentary. “I am in your left 9 o’clock. Check my tail!” He was worried the Hornet had made the impossible ‘square corner’ and was in a position to shoot. It seemed to have an unbelievable turn rate.

“Visual! Tail clear, Tiger 1!” sounded a very relieved Angela.

Michael dropped out of afterburner so as not to accelerate past Angela again. They kept their noses down, building up speed – so that they could regain performance to fight again. At 550 knots there was no immediate threat and they were back in a very good position to defend themselves. With their confidence high they could perhaps even go on the attack.

It was not to be. The Hornet pilot called ‘Bingo,’ in a very unhappy voice. The bogey normally ran out of fuel first because it used a lot more afterburner; positioning and attacking.

“Roger, Tiger Formation, Counter right, Track 12 towards Launceston,” Michael said not wanting to waste any more fuel. “Hornet 1, will you join us?” Michael asked. There was a pause. “He is not happy,” laughed Jordan over the intercom. “He thought we would be easy ‘beats’ with his thrust and fly by wire.”

“Sure, why not,” answered the Hornet pilot, sounding less angry. “Where do you want me, Tiger 1?” By the time he had completed his sentence he seemed to have accepted his lack of a ‘kill’. He had been in a good and unusual fight. Fighter pilots love that.

“Good,” said Michael. “Tiger 2, come into Attack Battle Formation, my right side. Hornet 1, you will go to Patrol Battle Formation left.”

“Roger, Tiger 1,” they both responded in turn. Michael saw Angela flying Hunty in behind them, right side, and the Hornet pop down left side, on the beam, 3 kilometres away.

“Looks so coool!” Michael said on the radio and glancing left at the aggressive, modern jet fighter abeam him. He was feeling really good, although once again, covered in perspiration from the exertions of air combat.

“Sheekan, Tiger Formation, going home,” he said to Paul on Tiger frequency.

“Gee, that sounded like a great battle?” Paul answered. “I would love to have been there!”

“Your old bones would have crumbled with the G, Dad,” joked Angela, and they all laughed over the radio.

“Sheekan, Hornet 1, how old are your pilots? They sound so young!” asked the Hornet pilot.

“You really don’t want to know,” answered Paul, and left it at that. To know he had been kept out by three teenagers, in well maintained, but 50 year old jet fighters might have made him very angry again. Fighter pilots hated losing at the best of times.

Before anyone could speak again Michael called the formation to the Brisbane ATC frequency and they checked in automatically. They flew the rest of the cruise back home, in silence; each obviously reflecting on the very unusual and exciting events of the past couple of days.

Michael began to look for the welcome sight of the Australian mainland off to their right. Then he could see it, at a great distance due the crystal clear air of Australia. Shortly after passing off the coast from the New South Wales and the small, inlet beaches backed by the emerald coastline, he looked further south and saw Flinders Island and the other islands of eastern Bass Strait. They were almost linked to their home of Tasmania, which could then be seen. Also, the familiar, crystal white beaches of Boobyalla at Tomahawk; and Waterhouse at Barnbogle where the family often enjoyed an exciting gallop along the beach on horses of friends who lived close by. The lush, green, omnipotent Ben Lomond, Mt. Barrow and Mt. Arthur mountains lay beyond. They were welcome sights, and it was good to be home.

But there was no time for further reflection. It was also the time to go down. Michael was given descent clearance by Melbourne ATC. (They had transferred from Brisbane ATC on their journey south west). He was told to contact their friend in Launceston Tower.

“Launy Tower, Tiger Formation is now three aircraft, including Hornet 1, an F/A 18. Is there any chance of the break from the North, as we did after Operation Gunboat?” Michael requested.

“Tiger Formation, we have heard of your success again. I anticipated your return. You are cleared from the North to Break right, to land on Runway

32 Left. We are looking forward to it!” The Tower Controller concluded with, “Call Final.”

“Launy Tower, Tiger Formation, cleared for Break right, will call Final Runway 32L.” Then, looking left to probably the world’s most successful fourth generation, multi-role, jet fighter in the world, he said, “Hornet 1, from Tiger 1, we will Break Right over the runway. I will Break first, Tiger 2 will Break as I fly over her. You Break with her, and it will give us the correct spacing on downwind. Will you be landing to refuel?” Michael asked finally, hoping they could have a chat on the ground.

“Tiger 1, Break instructions copied. I will Break Right with Tiger 2,” the Hornet pilot acknowledged. “I will not be landing. I have enough fuel to make Melbourne, and do a flypast rehearsal as soon as I arrive.”

“Roger, Hornet 1,” Michael responded. “Continue your turn after the Break for Melbourne. Pity we could not debrief on the ground.”

“Hornet 1, Launy Tower, I will relay your instructions to Melbourne Centre,” the Launceston tower controller said.

Michael had already reduced thrust while they had been chatting, and began accelerating in the descent. He did not have time to concentrate on the lovely scenery that surrounded their home of North East Tasmania. His focus was on making a successful, safe and spectacular Break and landing. He knew people talked about jet flybys for years after and he certainly wanted this one to be memorable.

He could see Mount Barrow and was aiming just to the right, where he knew the airport was. Then he saw it, and the runway. It was looking good. A quick glance down at the speed; it was 550 knots. They needed more! He eased the throttle forward and immediately felt the surge of power. Out to the left, the Hornet accelerated with him. In his rear view mirror, he could see Angela was keeping up in Hunty.

“Michael, remember the runway is short, so don’t forget the brake parachute,” warned Jordan over the intercom. “Thanks Jordan,” Michael

acknowledged. Jordan knew how hard he was working to do a low, fast and safe Break. He just wanted Michael to think ahead about the landing because it would happen very quickly and be completely different from Savu. Michael appreciated the input.

They were up to 600 knots (1200km/hr) at 1000 feet, 20 kilometres from their airfield. The runway was right across their flight path. Michael was aiming at the Tiger Flight Hangar where he knew his grandmother would be watching. The Passenger Terminal and Tower were to the right, alongside.

Michael saw the speed was 630 knots (1300 kilometres an hour) – we won't be supersonic, he thought—perfect! He was down to 300 feet, no lower, because Angela was even lower than him. The Mirage was very 'twitchy' on the controls at this very high speed. He concentrated on flying smoothly. A glance left. - the Hornet was locked abeam, three kilometres away.

They were crossing the valley north of the airfield. Everything was a blur for Michael, except for his focal point – the Tiger Flight hangar. As he crossed the runway, he snapped Delta into a climbing right turn, and pulled straight to 6G, closed the throttle and deployed the speed brake. The ademahr went straight to amber/red, with its high pitched tone. Michael and Jordan were both groaning in the turn.

“Fantastic! Fantastic!” called the Launceston Tower Controller, ecstatically.

The speed dropped rapidly in the turn to Downwind. With the G coming off the ademahr became less strident. Michael selected the speed brake in and the landing gear down.

“Tiger 1, this is Hornet 1, that was great fun. Thank you. You handled those magnificent, dinosaur jet fighters like masters,” said the Hornet pilot as he climbed North West towards Melbourne. “I hope we meet again, for another battle!”

“Hornet 1, this is Tiger 1. I hope we do meet again, but don’t expect to be any more successful against our amazing, classic, jet fighters,” answered Michael, while still concentrating on his position Downwind, accuracy, height and reducing speed. “Enjoy your Flypast!”

“Here, here, to all that,” Angela chipped in.

“Touché’!” laughed the Hornet pilot. “Hooroo, until next time!”

Jordan was laughing loud enough in the rear Mirage cockpit to activate the intercom, but did not say anything so as to allow Michael to concentrate on his circuit.

## Chapter

Michael flew the remaining circuit positively and accurately, with a lot of confidence because of all the demanding handling he had done on the previous few days. He ensured his approach speed was absolutely correct, because he did not want a fast landing on Launceston’s runway, which was a lot shorter than Savu’s.

After clearance from the Tower Michael made a firm landing on the left side, right on the threshold markers. He remembered to stream the brake parachute and felt the welcoming tug of the opening chute, followed shortly after by Angela’s call, “Tiger 2, down.” It was over. They had completed another successful mission.

“Great Mission Michael; nothing like a bit of high speed formation for handling confidence,” said Jordan over the intercom, as they turned off the runway after dropping the chute for the waving ‘Firey.’ “None of us could have done better!”

“Thanks Jordan ---“, Michael began, but was cut off by the Tower speaking on the radio, “Tiger Formation, Launy Tower, you will see more than the usual admirers on the Terminal viewing area, and behind the security fence by the Tiger Flight hangar. The locals are becoming used to your exploits in the Coral Sea, and have heard of your latest successes

against the Rebel Island Mig 21s and dolphin fishermen.” After taking a breath he continued, “Paul warned us of your imminent arrival with the flight plan, but the beat up was even more spectacular with the Hornet. You are about to receive a very warm welcome.”

So it was. As the two mighty, black, jet fighters taxied fast, as was their custom, passed the terminal, hundreds of spectators were waving from the balconies. Michael waved back through the canopy and was sure that Jordan was doing the same from the back seat. However it was Angela behind them, with Hunty’s canopy rolled back, who received most of the attention. Michael was sure she was almost standing in the cockpit and waving with both arms.

They were soon arriving at the Tiger Flight apron and could see their mother, aunt and grandmother, Cindy, standing there with the broadest grin on her face. She was always apprehensive before a mission but also pleased and proud when they returned. The expectant crowd could also be seen laughing and waving behind the security fence.

Michael parked Delta on his grandmother’s right, while Angela did the same on her left. Cindy held her hands firmly over her ears, to try and dim the horrendous roar and whine of the huge military engines, even at idle. They had soon shut down and were on the apron being embraced by Cindy, and occasionally waving at the crowd.

## Chapter

Then, without the engineers and Paul to help, they set about cleaning the jet fighters, refuelling and then towing them into the hangar. Cindy helped as much as she could but it was still a couple hours before they were ready to lock the hangar and head for their home at Tam O’Shanter, on the coast north of Launceston.

Darkness was gathering and the last of the crowd had departed when Cindy drove them in the four wheel drive through the security gates for home. The pilots were exhausted from all they had been through during the day, and Angela and Jordan had soon dozed off. Michael was quiet but

also subdued because he knew when he went to sleep that night he would probably wake up in his schoolboy dimension and be unable to talk about their latest adventure.

Arriving back at their beach house, it was a fresh evening with a full moon, which shone on the unusually calm waters of Bass Strait. It was always good to be back at this tranquil place after such a hectic couple of days. Kimba, their little, white, exuberant Staffordshire bull terrier gave them her normal, excitable welcome. She was especially pleased to see Michael, who was her favourite and always played with her. He gave her his attention for a while, making a fuss of her, despite his inner turmoil.

They were all soon showered and in bed, without a meal. After feeding Kimba, Michael hung his flight suit and helmet behind his door, then collapsed into bed, and despite trying to stay awake, was soon asleep.

## Chapter

Michael came awake with a start at dawn and immediately rolled over, looking at the back of the door – the flight suit was gone – the flying was over again!

The events that followed were the same as before, after a flying episode. All the family were there for breakfast including Paul. There was the normal banter between them after a good night's sleep, and the anticipation of spending another day around the jet fighters. No evidence at all of their adventure to Dolphin Island.

But back at the hangar, later, Michael found his knee pad indicating his briefing back from Savu. He also saw repairs to Hunty's starboard wing, but this time he did not even ask the engineers about it. His flying dimension was a world of his own, and as much as he wanted to tell the others about it, he was still not prepared to lose the chance of moving through the portal to his other, parallel universe and flying the magnificent jet fighters that he was standing between.

“Only the three of us know the secret,” he said conspiratorially to the imposing Hunter and Mirage, looking around to ensure no-one was listening to him. “I wonder what we will do on our next adventure?” After a quick pat and rub on each of their immaculately kept fuselages, he strode towards the Crew room where the others were preparing a schedule for their daily tasks. He felt a lot more confident about flying the jets next time, which helped him return to his normal good humour.