THE FIRST STUDENT PILOT JET-TRAINED BY THE RAAF WAS A NASHO:

The very first of these was Colin Peck who was halfway through a scholarship at Sydney Teachers College when he was called up for National Service in the RAAF. He was selected for the air force (rather than the army) based on a very unusual aviation experience. He lived in Grafton NSW and its wide Clarence River which hosted occasional visits of Catalina flying boats. Colin performed an unofficial, unpaid service for the crew, by zig-zagging his uncle's speedboat to create waves in front of the departing Catalinas so that they could "unstick" from the otherwise smooth surface.



National Service Training 2nd (Split) Intake - RAAF Base Williamtown
Col 2nd row – 2nd from Left

National Serviceman A26698 Colin Peck was mustered to RAAF Signals, disappointingly not to pilot training, but the pay was much better than it was as a trainee teacher. After NS, when he

returned to the Teachers College, he was shocked when the Education Department demanded that he repay the difference between his higher RAAF Nasho pay and his lower trainee-teacher pay. He protested unsuccessfully, because he had already spent it on beer, smokes, girls and the good life, so he resigned as a teacher and joined the RAAF full time instead, this time as a trainee pilot on DH Tiger Moths.

Col giving his thumbs up to the ground crew before his first solo
25/08/1953 RAAF 1st Solo (in A17-695) Archerfield QLD. Tiger Moth



After the Tiger Moths, along with thirteen other pilot graduates, he was selected for training on Wirraways. But mid-course, eight of them were selected for training on DH Vampires instead. Colin Peck was the second youngest at 19, but he topped the course, so at the graduation ceremony at Point Cook on 7th July 1954, his jet "wings" were pinned on by Air Vice Marshall Val Hancock. He

was therefore the first RAAF-trained jet pilot, albeit by only five minutes, before the second Vampire jet pilot was similarly adorned with “wings”.

After completing fighter training, the eight jet pilots were posted to 25 Squadron at RAAF Pearce just north of Perth, flying Vampires with black swans painted on each side. In the first week of their posting, in two formations of four aircraft each, they ferried them across Australia from Williamtown NSW on 29 October 1954 and landing at Laverton Victoria, then at Woomera SA.

They then had to wait until 1st November when the heavy head winds abated enough for them to resume the flight. Colin said “We had a Canberra bomber flying ahead of us. Its navigator would determine for us what speed the winds were because that’s the only way you knew back then, so finally the Canberra reported back that the head wind had dropped below 80 knots and that meant our Vampires could get to Forrest”.

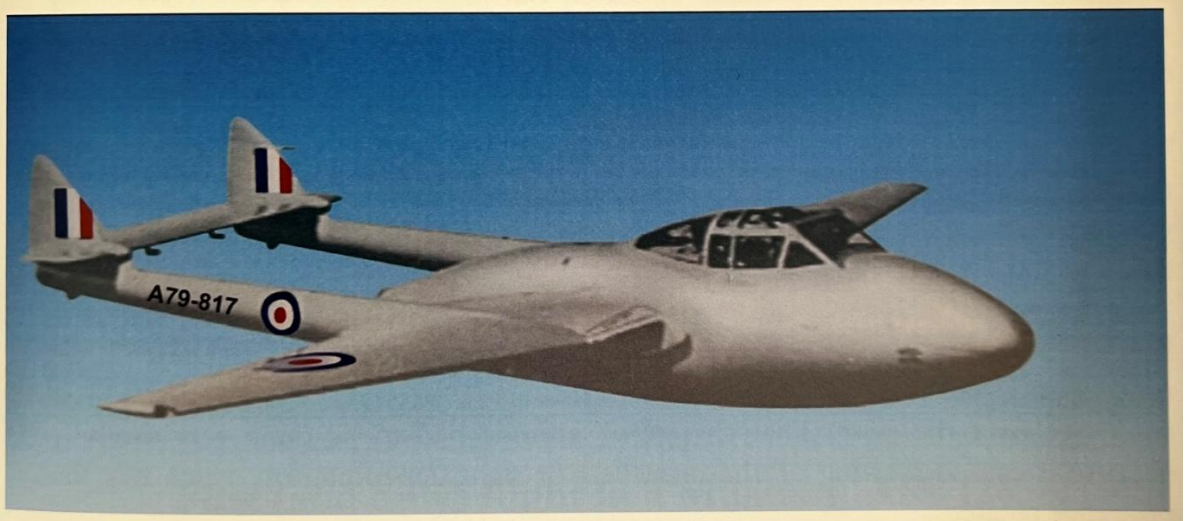




At Forrest airfield, WA refuelling out of 44-gallon drums. The row of thin poles along the horizon behind the planes marks the position of the Trans Australia railway line which served as our major navigation aid to finding Forrest. Ground crew and fuel had been positioned there by the DC-3 in the background.

Colin's Meteor A77-884 on the right.

I think the record jet stream wind speed in those days was 320 knots, but the maximum I experienced was about 220 knots. If it's a tailwind you're flying in a block of air moving at 220 knots in your direction across the ground and if your airspeed is 400 knots you are moving at 620 knots across the ground. If its a headwind your block of air is moving you backwards so the speed over the ground is reduced to 180 knots.



Colin flew this Vampire Mach 35 (2 seater) across country on a delivery run

After the Vampires, Colin flew Meteors and Sabres all over Australia, and a mighty propellor driven Mustang with its Rolls-Royce Merlin on its final flight before scrapping.

Colin left the air force after being told by career officers in the mess, that as a Nasho he would never rise to high rank, because unlike them, he was not a career officer. By that stage the fun of flying had paled anyway, because his main job was now to teach other pilots to fly jets, rather than zooming all over the sky himself. He then left the Air Force to help rescue his father's failing business. He then moved to Coolangatta and was a flying school instructor before joining Qantas to fly Boeing 707s in 1966, then 747s from 1971.

Colin Peck retired as a Qantas Senior Check Captain 40 years ago in 1986, to grow lychees and macadamia nuts in south-east Queensland. Like many other Nashos, his National Service in 1951 started him on a long journey of achievements in living life. Many of these first RAAF-trained fighter jet pilots became lifelong friends throughout their stellar aviation careers. Sadly as I write this in 2026, none of them are left. (Pete Norman, Editor)

[Source: Flying to Farming – The life and times of Colin Peck. ISBN 979-8-24-048621-0]