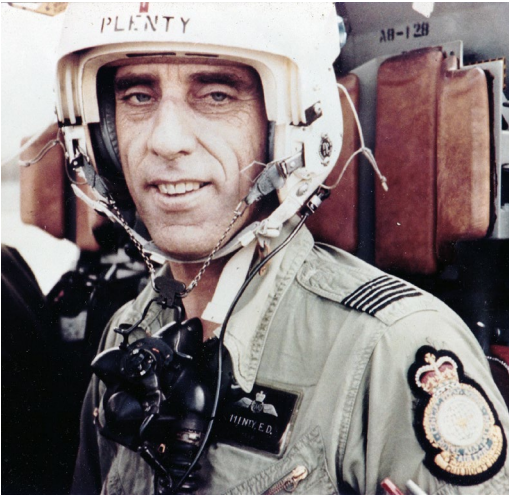


Wing Commander Ed Plenty (Retd) 1931 - 2019



A respected pilot, flying instructor and loving father, WGCdr Edwin (Ed) Plenty (Retd) passed away in Darwin on 28 February 2019. He was surrounded by family, with his life memorialised in a funeral service on March 8.

Edwin David Plenty was born in country South Australia on 7 April 1931, growing up in Napperby (near Port Pirie) as the youngest of seven children.

Ed's father Clarence served at Gallipoli, the Sinai and Palestine in the First World War, and his older brothers Herbert, Geoffrey and John joined the Air Force early in the Second World War.

Sadly, Geoffrey did not survive the Second World War, being killed in a flying accident in Egypt in August 1944. Herb passed away in 2013 after a long Air Force Career and John passed away in 2017.

During a 30-year Air Force career, Ed Plenty flew many different aircraft, served in a number of flying and staff posts and commanded three units. He trained many pilots, navigators and flying instructors, and was influential in the Government decision to lease 24 F-4E Phantoms as an interim aircraft until the delivery of F-111Cs.

Ed left school before completing his Intermediate Certificate to assist on the family farm, during which time he completed night school. He remained determined to be a pilot and enlisted in the Air Force in February 1951 as a trainee engine fitter. While undergoing training, he spent what spare money he had on flying lessons at the Royal Newcastle Aero Club and Canberra Aero Club.

On completion of his Engine Fitter training Ed was posted to the Aircraft Research and Development Unit at RAAF Base Laverton, where he applied for and was accepted for pilot training at Uranquinty (near Wagga Wagga). Ed commenced training on No 10 Pilots course in August 1952, graduating as a Sergeant Pilot in September 1953; during which he flew Tiger Moth and Wirraway.

Ed was posted to the School of Air Navigation, RAAF Base East Sale, as a staff pilot, where he flew C-47 Dakotas at School of Air Navigation (SAN) employed for basic navigator training, and the four-engine Avro Lincoln bomber, for advanced navigator training. During this posting he was part of the Royal Inspection by HM Queen Elizabeth II at RAAF Base Point Cook in 1954. He also flew Wirraway and Mustang at Central Flying School as part of pilot continuation training.

In April 1954, Ed Plenty married his fiancé Helen, and later that year he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer. In 1956 he completed Flying Instructors Course and was posted to Uranquinty to instruct at No 1 Basic Flying Training School.

In 1958 he was posted to 6SQN at Amberley where he trained on the Canberra bomber with subsequent postings to 1SQN and 2SQN in Butterworth, Malaya. While on the Canberra at Butterworth, Ed flew missions during Indonesian Confrontation that included very low level reconnaissance flights. He also carried out exercises and deployments to the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Vietnam. On his return to Australia in 1962, Ed instructed crews on Canberra conversion courses at No 1 (Bomber) Operational Conversion Unit.

Posted to the Directorate of Flying Safety in Canberra in 1966, Ed also became heavily involved with the identification of missing Australian airmen and aircraft wrecks from the War in the Pacific.

After completing RAAF Staff College in 1968, he hoped to return to flying duties but was instead posted to Air Force Headquarters as Staff Officer 'Operational Requirements – Bomber'.

This came at a critical juncture for Air Force, which was dealing with delays in the F-111C program. Ed was given the task of writing a Cabinet Submission proposing the lease of 24 F4E Phantoms until the F-111C issues were resolved. The Secretary of Defence, the Chief of Air Staff and Ed met with the Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, to discuss the proposal, which was subsequently approved.

The F-4Es were ferried to Australia in 1970, and Ed listened to the delivery flight on a radio from Russell Offices. In his autobiography he recounted "We kept those F4s for about three years and my one disappointment was that after all that effort, I never even got a ride in one".

On promotion to WGCDR in late 1970, Ed was posted as Commanding Officer of Central Flying School at RAAF Base East Sale from 1971 to 1973. In this position he instructed on Winjeel, C47 Dakota and Macchi. During this posting he visited RAF CFS and a significant outcome was restructuring of the RAAF QFI course. The Roulettes aerobatic team had been formed in 1970, and Ed accompanied them on displays during the RAAF's 50th Anniversary celebrations in 1971.

Postings followed to RAAF Support Command, Melbourne in 1974 as the Command Operations Officer and management of aircrew training. In 1977 he was posted to RAAF Base Darwin as the Base Commanding Officer, during which time he flew his final military flight on the Base's C47 Dakota. Ed spent considerable efforts securing or arguing for resources to refurbish or replace RAAF Base infrastructure damaged by cyclone Tracy.

Ed's final RAAF posting in 1979 was to the Directorate of Personnel Services in Canberra, during which time he achieved approval for presentation of the Governor-General's Banner to training units and support establishments that did not qualify for a Squadron Colours banner.

Reluctantly retiring from the Air Force at 50 years old in 1981, Ed and his family moved to a property at Howard Springs, Northern Territory where he gained civil flying qualifications and instructed with the Darwin Aero Club, rapidly becoming the Chief Flying Instructor. He taught many local pilots to fly, becoming a well known local aviation identity and mentor before finally hanging up the headset in 2002.

Ed remained close to the Air Force community throughout his retirement. He kept close association with RAAF Base Darwin and the Officers Mess Honorary members. He was granted Honorary Life Membership of the Officer Mess and accepted Honorary Patron of the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory in 2016.

WGCDR Ed Plenty is survived by his wife Helen, five children, 12 grandchildren, and 12 great grandchildren.

Matthew Plenty (son)