

## Pathway to survival

Robert Tierney

(aka "Young Jack" on The Island)

### Cynthia's introduction

Robert trained as an air traffic controller at the University of Tasmania and started work with Air Services Australia in 1991. In 1994 he froze with fear as a *mid air incident* unfolded on his screen, narrowly avoiding a mid-air collision. Then a number of close family members died and he suffered a breakdown. His boss moved him to the compliance department, where he found some serious system failures and so began his life as a whistleblower, which almost frightened the very life out of him. Nearly twenty years later, he is slowly coming to terms with his fears.

### Rob's talk (an edited extract from his notes)

I am a 58-year-old highly eccentric former air traffic controller. I worked without incident to the satisfaction of my employer until 29 October 1994 when I dealt with a mid-air incident west of Sydney. This incident started a chain of events leading to a breakdown in June 1995.



I returned to the Melbourne Air Traffic Control (ATC) Centre in March 1996 and was placed in operational support. I began to discover what I felt were numerous dangerous and potentially fatal flaws in the ATC system. In April I rang the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation reporting hotline and reported all the air safety problems as well as ringing Melbourne ATC Centre and advising the team leaders of the worst problems. The more I dug the more safety risks I discovered.

After 15 months of fighting to get my air safety concerns fixed, I resigned from Air Services Australia

on 12 June 1997. Three days later I was offered quite a bit more than \$100,000 by Civil Air, the ATC union, which was in effect hush money. Acceptance would have meant a 12-month psychiatrist's medical certificate deeming me "mentally unwell" so Air Services Australia could say "See we told you his Air Safety Report was the ranting of a lunatic." I thought about the offer for five minutes, declined and have never been near the ATC Centre since.

The fight continued for some years afterwards with some air traffic controllers ringing me at home with their air safety concerns saying, "You take it to the Minister as you have lost everything anyway" or words to that effect.

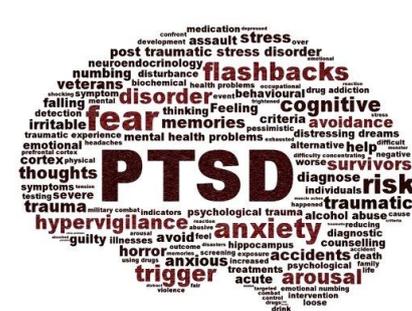
I became an alcoholic while trying to cope with the stress of the mid air incident, the ATC job itself and subsequent whistleblowing. I have been sober for more than 20 years now but suffer from PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and moderate to severe chronic fatigue syndrome.

My desired outcome from all this has always been an official investigation into the whole business of air traffic control with the aim of improving it resulting in greater safety for everyone who flies. Any investigation would need to be conducted by a non-Australian organisation with impeccable credibility and competence *and* without any political interference from Canberra. Hell will freeze over before this ever happens!

My story is ancient history however for me it is yesterday. Every time I have tried to pull my story together I have had a PTSD relapse requiring a month in hospital, with seven hospitalizations in 20 years.

Whistleblowers sometimes commit suicide. I know two who did.

The video I'm showing you today was composed of segments from other videos about air traffic control, dramatising the tensions of the job and the nature of the job (including what is called a separation breakdown, when aeroplanes are closer to each other than the required distance). My experience was with a separation breakdown during which I froze due to fear. I still have nightmares about it.



Part of my PTSD healing process was doing a sky-dive. Another was facing the media. Today's step is giving this talk at the WBA conference. After 20 years of mainly silence due to real and imagined fears, speaking and telling my story at this conference is *very* important to me as I move towards resolution.

Facing fear gives me self-respect. The treasure I seek is peace of mind.

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I STRONGLY suggest that anyone reading this article who is considering exposing wrongdoing (where it is in the public interest to do so) do the following:

1. Download and read the free PDF manual.
2. Contact Whistleblowers Australia for guidance.
3. If you wish email me at [jumpingformenandboys@gmail.com](mailto:jumpingformenandboys@gmail.com) for a chat about what NOT to do!.

Otherwise....

You WILL lose the lot as I did and be alone in court!

Your Life – Your Choice

Thanks for reading

Hope to visit mum and dad and have a little chat on the grave within the next 30 days or so?

Kind Regards to all Islanders

Young Jack (age 58!)