

From Waif to RAAF.



**A recollection of a life
In the Royal Australian Air Force.**

Wing Commander Ted Ilton

Royal Australian Air Force.

(from 27th October 1947 to 30th April 1976)



Over the Tarmac at Laverton

(Hawker Demon A1-22, RAAF Station Laverton 1934)

PROLOGUE.

It was a thunderstorm-laden sky on this hot 1932 summer day with a strong northerly wind sweeping over the Youyang ranges and across the dry Werribee plains and towards the tiny township of Laverton in Victoria where the little 5 year old Teddy Ilton was playing at aeroplanes in the playground of the Laverton Public School.

As the storm approached, the school bell rang thus signalling the premature conclusion of the afternoon play-time recess, young Teddy was at the far end of the school ground when the storm struck. Thunder, lightning severe wind and hail raged around him and the school yard. The school's water tank was blown over and almost soared across the ground as it emptied its contents, with young Teddy in its path. The now empty tank skewed around in front of Teddy who, in trying to avoid being over-run, jumped into the run-away tank.

Tumbling over-and-over, the tank finally came to rest at the school's boundary fence. The bruised, battered and rain-drenched little Teddy, closely attended by his 8 year-old sister, was carried into the school house by the teacher. At about this same moment, Teddy's mum, who had noted the storm from the backyard of her house and it's closeness to the School, had hurried to the scene. On finding her wet and dishevelled and still frightened little boy quickly said:-

what a poor sad looking little waif you are..



AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The book that follows is unashamedly autobiographical in nature. Lacking in the skills of authorship and proper practices and principles of book-writing, punctuation and the English grammatics associated therewith and being too old at 76 to learn these arts, I have contented myself with an aim to just commit my story to paper. At the same time however, the narrative which follows is very much a chronology of the events and happenings as they occurred.

As the title suggests, the book, unquestionably anecdotal in flavour, is about the Royal Australian Air Force. Moreover, I am pleased to say that in my 30 odd years with the RAAF, there were no significant changes, in either Force culture or conduct. Those of us who served in those, what I call halcyon days, were indeed honoured and privileged to be members of, which I continue to describe as, that wonderful Royal Australian Air Force.

In hindsight my being born at Laverton in 1927, where my father was the Railway Station Master, was a prophetic lead-in to my subsequent 30 year RAAF career. Instead of the expected interest in trains as part of the railway environment into which I was born, my eyes were more for the skies looking at the Wapitis, Hawker Demons, Bristol Bulldogs and other early vintage aircraft from the Laverton Air Force station which flew low over our railway house and school. Also, as my father was an honorary member of the Sergeants Mess, most of our friends and the guests to our house at that time, were either Sergeants or had some other connection with the RAAF.

Later and perhaps again prophetically, in 1943 at age 16, I was seconded from the Post Master General's Department to work at RAAF West Sale (and occasionally at RAAF East Sale). A similar stint occurred during 1945, 1947 when I worked with a RAAF Catalina Flight at Cairns following which and where I also learned to fly at the Cairns Flying School in 1945-46.

My RAAF colleagues, many of whom having also retired to the Gold Coast, constantly urged me to do a book complete with some of my RAAF anecdotes. My family too, have urged me to write about this same epoch, So, within the pages that follow, here is my literal transcription of my humble story which shades into complete insignificance alongside the much more grand and recent celebrations concerning the historic stories of A Hundred Years of Flight.

*However, I do sincerely hope that my readers will accept the **warts and all, commas or no commas** and **for better or worse** rendition of :-*

From WAIF to RAAF

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I have noted in the many books that I read there is usually an author's acknowledgement of all sorts of people for their help and inspiration concerning the putting together of a particular book. Well, with this book of mine, acknowledgements are not so much for assistance given but more for recognising my many RAAF compatriots that I was most fortunate to have had during my three decades of Air Force service. Some of whom I have named in various parts and sections of the book which, in itself acknowledges the people concerned and also pays homage to their influence.

Others I have avoided naming, not only to protect the innocent but perhaps also to forestall retrospective disciplinary action arising from conduct prejudicial to good order and Air Force discipline. Quite a number in some way have and no doubt quite unwittingly at the time, provided much of the anecdotal colour and humour which is now included in this narrative.

I must also acknowledge the wonderful immediate post-war spirit amongst those who chose and were selected to serve on in the Permanent (post-war) RAAF. A spirit strong with professionalism, camaraderie and the wonderful culture of the pre and post-war eras and which was still very much alive during my thirty years of service. To say that we were part of a well conducted and close family would be indeed to under-state the case. Regrettably, as history has since shown, this esprit de corps was forced to bend with the winds of social and economic change which began to eddy through the Royal Australian Air Force in the 80's and 90's with resultant dramatic changes to the old ways. Some would say these winds, had become something akin to gales by the time the new millennium was ushered in.

Having said this, the remainder of this book will not reflect these changes but instead will hopefully rekindle a warmth of nostalgia for those who read what is truly meant to be my acknowledgement of thirty of the best years of my life. Albeit, with the accompaniment of my already acknowledged lack of writing skills. The odd chuckle should, nonetheless, result here and there in the pages that follow, together with perhaps a re-living of some of the recounted episodes.

DEDICATION.

I dedicate this book to:-

Mattee, my darling wife of 53 years who passed away on the 03rd Dec 2003 and who, for the preceding two years had been living apart from me in a Nursing Home due to a continuing illness but nevertheless has remained my inspiration.



The level of success attained in our marriage in my Royal Australian Air Force career and in my retirement would not have been at all possible without her love, understanding and support and also to our two children, Gary and Robyn who too, in so many ways, have been supportive particularly with their individual encouragement which eventually became the catalyst for this story about that one-time little waif from Laverton all of those years ago.

And.

I further dedicate these writings to Joel, my fourteen year-old grandson and thank him for his encouragement and enthusiasm in reading and commenting on each draft section which fuelled my enthusiasm to continue.

My heartfelt thanks to each of you.

Table of contents

Description	Page.	Description	Page.
Acknowledgements	5	Prologue	3
Author's Forward.	4	RAAF Staff College Training	280
Beaufort Trim Problem	55	Thai Royal visit	244
Becoming "Old Hands" in Malaysia	249	The Ballarat years.	125
Beginning of the Malaysian experience	227	The Clive King story	295
Butterworth Re-Visited 1972-1974	320	The Commissioning Course Jan-Mar53.	172
Cairns flying school.	94	The Froggall Days Nov 1954 – Aug 1957.	205
Central Reserve Kingswood background	274	The Japan Days.	148
Dedication	6	The Laverton Days 1927 – 1934.	17
Dep Air moves to Canberra	219	The Laverton Days 1954.	193
Family Background	16	The Lord Nelson prank	288
History of East Sale	299	The Moorabbin Days 1934 - 1936	24
Melbourne and PMG re-visited.	107	The Nomad times, 1939 – 1944.	40
My RAAF Postings.	117	The Nth Qld years - 1945 - 48.	77
My Recruit Training – Laverton.	119	The OTS days 12Jan53 – 30Mar53.	168
Off to East Sale	299	The RAAF presence in Butterworth	223
On-board M.V. Roma	225	The Rathmines Days - 1952	159
OTS Rathmines – 1952.	161	The Support Command days 1975	337
Our 1 st posting to Canberra (Jul1959)	219	The Sydney years - 1945	70
Our move back to Canberra.	282	The Tallygaroopna days 1936 – 1939.	29
Our move to Malaysia – Jul60.	224	The Vic Barracks years.	212
Our return to Australia – Mar63	258	The Wagga Days.	181
Parents Separate.	38	The Young years 1943-1947.	44
Point Cook – Mar63	259	To salute or not to salute.	196
Posting to RAAF Kingswood	270	The HS748 incident at Sale.	314
Preface	13		

List of illustrations...

Description	Page.	Description	Page.
1 AD Headquarters.	195	CO's short Law Course, OTS, 1965	270
1 Radio Apprentice Course.	129	Confirmation of commission.	178
13 Course RAAF Academy	266	Coolgardi safe.	27
1952 RAAF Iwakuni AFL team.	165	Corporal Ted.	162
1956 TV Set.	215	Course 22 Cricket team	290
2 Squadron Canberras	236	Damaged hanger, Iwakuni.	155
75 Sqn aircraft and crew.	149	Dick Hamer – Premier of Vic	345
76 Wing Sabres	236	Dignatory visits to East Sale.	317
A little Waif	3	Dilapidated Chinese Mansion.	325
A Proud Ted.	141	Domestic Help, 1960 - 1963	255
Admiral Lord Nelson	288	Duke of Gloucester	29
Adrian Quist	42	E & O E Hotel, Penang	229
Aerial view RAAF Kingswood	275	E & O E Hotel, Penang (1973).	330
Air Cdre Ford welcoming Governor	247	East Sale Main Gate	304
Air Marshal David Evans	231	Entrance to East Sale	300
Air Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger.	131	Fairey Battle	181
Air Marshall George Jones.	122	Farewell to the Cats.	107
Air Vice-Marshal Scherger.	214	Farewell to VH-AQQ.	107
Airman's Mess, Iwakuni.	154	Fl Lt Smithies & Thai King inspect guard	249
Airspeed Oxford	53	FlLt Ned Grose, F/O Ted Leach Cpl Ted Ilton.	165
Alf Ilton, Station Master, 1936.	32	Froggnall Appies	217
Amy Johnson at Laverton	22	Froggnall.	205
Anzac Parade Canberra 1993	61	Frontispiece	1
ARDU Sabre over the MCG	222	Garden Party, Penang	241
Arriving Iwakuni.	153	Gary Beck	266
Australian penny.	73	Gary Ilton, Quarter Sergeant Cadet	273
Avro Anson.	48	Gary Ilton – Wing Commander	342
Ballarat Instructors 1948.	134	Geisha Doll in glass case.	159
Ballarat Railway Station.	126	Goodwood Park Hotel	227
Ballarat Royal tour 1954.	188	Gough Whitlam.	334
Bermagui tourist flier	301	Government invitation	240
Black Jack Walker.	55	Gp Capt J.S. Wilson	305
Boarding the F27 Canberra – Sydney	225	Grandpa Chandler's car	37
Bob Menzies.	201	Harold Clapp, Vic Railways Commissioner	35
Brighton Baths (1945).	75	Harry Witt (USAF)	283
Bristol Britannia	256	Hawker Demon	2
Bulk Butter.	111	Hillman Minx.	139
Bull Garing DSO	60	Hiroshima.	166
Bull Garing.	53	Horse and Gig – circa 1936	33
Burwood House.	335	Humber Super Snipe.	322
Butterworth Golf Course.	326	Ian McLennon.	340
C.J. Melrose	23	Indonesian Visit	285
Cairns City.	85	Kawana Hotel.	156
Cairns Mudflats.	84	Kings School Cadets on Parade	273
Cameron Highland Bungalow	334	Kingsford-Smith and Ulm	23
Catalinas at Lake Maquarie.	173	Korea.	150
Chadless Baudot paper tape.	63	Laverton Officer's Mess.	194
Charlie Jones and me.	77	Link Trainer	52
Childhood photos	18	Lone Pine Hotel	254
Clive King	297	Lydiard St tea rooms.	127
Clive King, Air Commodore	298	Main Entrance Iwakuni.	153

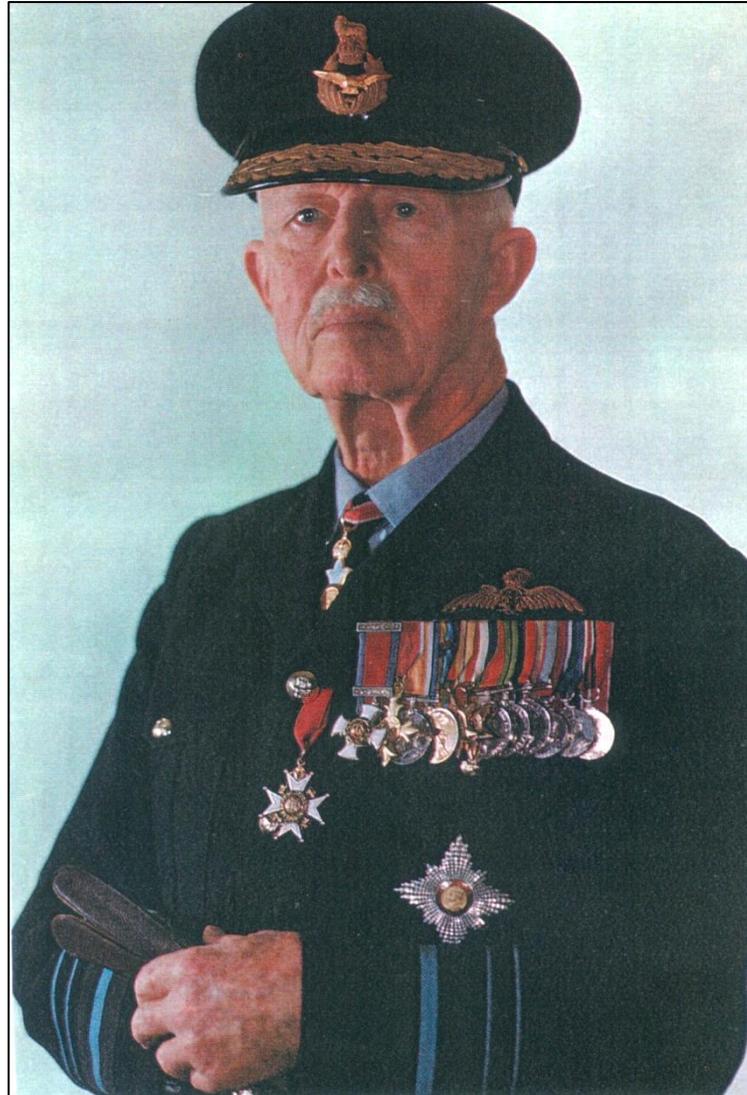
Mandarin Hotel Singapore	322	RAAF OTS Crest	267
Manly ferry 1945.	74	RAAF School #1 Penang	234
Mark IV Jaguar and me.	191	RAAF to/from Base transport	235
Mark IV Jaguar.	190	RAAF_Catalina	79
Mattee and our new son.	206	Radio Butterworth get together.	328
Mattee in tennis gear.	142	Radschool Crest.	188
Mattee's Ballarat house.	193	RAF Vulcan landing at Butterworth	238
Melbourne Olympic Pool	218	RAN Sea Fury.	185
Mitchell Bomber.	90	Relaxing on board MV Roma	226
Morse Key	62	Renault Bullnose Tourer.	19
MV Nevezza	252	Richard Williams (AVM)	344
MV Roma	222	Robert Menzies	44
My Darling Mattee.	140	Robert "Snow" Joske.	326
My day 1 as instructor.	136	Rookwood Mortuary Platform.	80
My Letter of Enlistment.	114	RTU Crest.	119
My Parent's wedding photo.	17	Russell Offices – ACT	292
My Solo flight.	93	Shopping for the ring.	144
Neville Mitchell and me.	95	Signaller brevet.	191
No 1 Specialist Engineering Officers Course.	180	Sir Richard Williams at Cadet Parade	15
No 7 RTU Course Laverton.	124	Sir Richard Williams KBE CB DSO	12
Nowa Nowa rural scene (1930)	21	Spirit of Progress.	39
Off to Korea.	151	Spring Rd School, Malvern.	41
Officer Mess, 426 St Kilda Rd.	216	St Kilda Rd Tram.	112
Oldsmobile – 1936 model.	47	Straits Trading Company.	331
Oronsay berthing in Sydney 1963	259	Sydney Toaster tram.	72
Oronsay Suite.	336	Tallygaroopna class of 1936	30
OTS Directing Staff – 1966	269	Tallygaroopna main street, 1936.	30
OTS Pre-selection Course.	161	Tallygaroopna Memorial Hall 1936.	32
Our 1956 Dodge	232	Tallygaroopna school building 1936.	31
Our 1st house in Canberra	220	Tallygaroopna Station Master house 1936.	31
Our 2nd house in Canberra	294	Ted & Family leaving Canberra	224
Our 1st house in Melbourne.	194	Ted at the Tori-gate.	167
Our house in Jesselton Road	233	Ted getting an intro to an Angklung	286
Our MQ at East Sale	307	Ted with the Vanguard.	143
Our new house in Penang	230	Ted, RAAF Kimpo Korea, Sep 1952	166
Our Wedding Photo.	145	Telegram OTS selection.	170
Our Wedding.	146	Telegram sample	67
Palm Beach Caravan Park	302	Telegram Ted (Warrigal 1942)	43
Panther motor bike.	135	Telegraph Office Sydney 1945.	71
Penang Club.	324	Thai Royals with Air Cdre Ford	248
Penang Ferry	235	The Baron of Beef" Team – Sept 71	311
Penang Sports Club Entrance	243	The Coast at Cardwell.	82
Penang Sports Club Members	242	The Hostie – Penang.	328
Penang Swimming Club	239	The "Spotted Mullett.	315
Penang Swimming pool	242	Three pence coin.	37
Piggy back Ansons.	187	Tiger and me (update).	96
Plug & cord switchboard	64	Tiger Moth.	91
PMG Reunion 1994	70	Trishaw race.	325
Pontiac Parisienne	316	Typical Canberra House, late 1960's	291
Presentation to local convent.	333	Typical Officer MQ Penang	231
Qantas First Class.	320	US Army Mess Tent.	158
Qantas 747 over Sydney.	321	US Army Tent.	157
Queen's Coronation.	185	Verey pistol.	106
RAAF Academy Crest	261	Vic Barracks, Melbourne.	338
RAAF Base Point Cook Crest	260	War surplus Avro Anson.	104
RAAF Cairns Met Office.	78	Wedding telegram.	147
RAAF Catalina.	79	West Sale Airport.	46
RAAF Laverton Crest.	195	WgCdr Hunt receiving his GpCapt Cap	277

WgCdr Hunt's farewell departure (1966)
Winjeel – en route East Sale

278
268

Epilogue...

Description	Page.	Description	Page.
Coolangatta and Tweed Heads Golf Club – 1980's			361
Extract from P/P29 Officers Confidential Report			347
Frognall Cadet Journal.			384
Golden Wedding Anniversary (26 May 2001)			370
Mini Staff College Course Reunion Butterworth – 1973			351
Our Gold Coast House (1980 – 2013)			368
Potential sale of Point Cook Base			382
Regular Defence Force Welfare Association dinner list (Apr87)			366
Ted and Bev Malone start a life together			372
Ted forms the Staff College Association (1990)			379
Ted joins the "White Shoe Brigade"			357
Ted moves into the Domain nursing home (March 2013)			417
Ted's 50 year membership, United Service Club Brisbane (2007)			377
Ted's job application CV (1976)			355

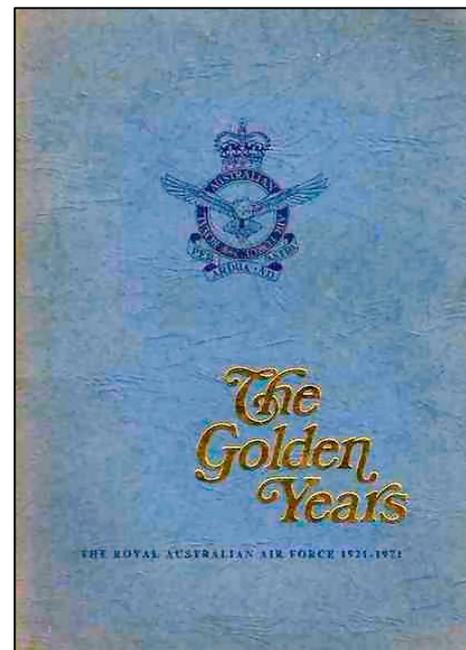


Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams KBE CB DSO ([Back](#))
The first Chief of the Air Staff, Royal Australian Air Force

PREFACE. ([Back](#))

The story told in this book concerns events that occurred during the authors 30 years service in the Royal Australian Air Force, however some of the earlier history of the RAAF as well as some of the beginnings of Australian Military Aviation, would not be inappropriate before leading into the book's main story.

Accordingly and for this purpose, I have selected from the RAAF's 50th anniversary book, *The Golden Years (of) The Royal Australian Air Force, 1921 to 1971*, what I believe to be a more than appropriate Preface for this book of mine. It is in fact a direct quote of the Foreword to *The Golden Years* as written, in 1971, by the late Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams KCB CBE DSO; who was and deservedly still is, popularly and most appropriately, known as The Father of the Royal Australian Air Force. I now quote:-



Although captive balloons had been used previously in war, it was the success of the Wright brothers in achieving sustained and controlled flight in a heavier than air craft in December 1903 that made aviation, as we now know it, possible.

The flight from Calais across the English channel to Dover by Bleriot in 1909 brought the possibilities of this type of aircraft prominently to the British Government and people.

The Australian Army was probably as alive as any to the possibilities for in that same year it offered a prize of five thousand pounds for an aircraft which 'could remain in a marked area for not more than half a square mile and be navigated at such speed as to allow an observer to make a comprehensive description of the land in the area', in other words, it was calling for 'a vehicle for reconnaissance'.

At an Imperial Conference in London in 1912 it was decided that aviation should be developed within the armed forces of the British Empire. Australia implemented this decision, the only Dominion to do so, by establishing a Central Flying School at Point Cook, Victoria in 1914.

This action made it possible to add a Flying Corps to the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.) in the 1914-18 War and that Corps established a most creditable reputation for itself in the air, in Palestine and France.

Whilst the principal duty of our first squadron in the field was reconnaissance, experience soon revealed the much wider useful role that aircraft could perform and they were used in addition for the attack on hostile targets not only in the air but also on the ground, as well as the sea, at speed and at great distances apart, quite beyond the ability of the ground or sea forces.

Both the Royal Navy and the British Army had their air services at this time and on 1 April 1918

they were amalgamated to form the Royal Air Force, a third fighting service co-equal with the Navy and Army. The reason for this was not only to discontinue the duplication of staffs and establishments involved in the two services, but also to terminate the competition between them for the output of industry which was not of benefit to the British Treasury.

The Australian Flying Corps remained part of the Army but disappeared with the demobilisation of the A.I.F. at the conclusion of the 1914-18 War.

It was Government policy at this time to adopt the same organisation in Australia's armed services as in the United Kingdom. It was perhaps not surprising then that on completion of service in the A.I.F. and on appointment as Director of Air Services at Army Headquarters, I found the Minister for Defence, Senator G.F. (later Sir George) Pearce and the Prime Minister, Mr W. H. (Billy) Hughes, determined to establish an Australian air force as a separate service.

The only existing aviation establishment in Australia at that time was the Central Flying School at Point Cook which had been maintained throughout the 1914-18 War only by the refusal of the Minister to approve proposals for its being closed down as a training establishment.

The Flying School alone would not have formed a sufficient foundation on which to build an air force, but fortunately the United Kingdom Government had presented Australia with 128 aeroplanes together with spare engines, spare parts, tools, transport, canvas hangars etc. These were sufficient to form units and it was with these assets that the Air Force was formed on 31 March 1921.

I am sure that without either Sir George Pearce or the gift equipment from the United Kingdom Government, the Air Force would not have been formed at that time.

Sir Richard Williams said It was my privilege and honour, at the age of thirty, to be the senior officer of the new service.

Almost at once Australia began to suffer a financial depression and, 'defence' being the first to take a cut, development was extremely slow. Experience in Palestine, where the conditions were comparable to those of Australia made it clear to me that an air force, being the most mobile, the most flexible and the hardest hitting of the armed services, capable of attacking an enemy before he reaches our coast and of continuing such attack if he succeeds in landing was what a huge island continent such as Australia most needed. Yet whilst Mr Bruce was in power from 1923 to 1929 I was told that the defence of Australia depended on the Navy and consequently, although a programme of development for the Air Force was approved, little was achieved because of a lack of funds.

This position existed until 1929 when, with another financial depression approaching, the Scullin (Labor) Government came into office and a proposal was made to it by the then Secretary of Defence to split the Air Force between the older services.

It fell to me to meet this attack principally by the claim that the full power of aircraft would only be developed by airmen, not by sailors or soldiers who regarded aircraft merely as auxiliaries.

The Scullin Government rejected the proposal.

Another change of Government (Lyons) came in 1932 and the easing of the depression together with the activities of Hitler in European politics, resulted in more funds becoming available, but the Navy was still said to be our main line of defence and the amount provided for Air Force development remained small until 1937.

Whenever I claimed that ships were vulnerable to air attack I was met with the statement, 'it has not been proved in war'. That was true, of course, but there had been tremendous development in the hitting power of aircraft since the 1914-18 War and the proof of my claim was soon to come.

The existence of the Air Force was not again threatened, but war came in 1939 when it was still below the strength considered necessary and indeed approved by Government ten years earlier. What Air Force we had was good, most members of it were there because of their interest in aviation and they proved their worth in the work they were called on to do when war came, be it in the field or in training others.

The thousands of young Australian men and women who came into the Air Force during the 1939-45 War (182,000 ed.) gave magnificent service in every theatre in which they were employed, to the credit of themselves and of Australia. But the details of the smaller wars, service which has been second to none, are given in the pages of this Golden Years book.

The Royal Australian Air Force can hold its head high on the occasion of its fiftieth birthday. I am proud to have worn the blue¹ uniform.

As an aside at this point, I take the opportunity to mention that when I retired from the RAAF in 1976, I was appointed the inaugural State Commandant for the Victorian Squadron of the RAAF's Air Training Corps. A major activity of the year for all ATC Squadrons at that time, (and possibly still is?) was the annual Drill and Passing Out parade. Usually a senior serving RAAF officer was invited to review the Parade and present prizes. I thought I might go one better on this occasion. I invited, through Air Officer Commanding Support Command Air Vice-Marshal Fred Barnes, Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams whom, after responding with some specific questions about the nature of the parade etc, accepted my invitation with pleasure. It was indeed a grand celebratory day of pomp and ceremony enjoyed by all, particularly Sir Richard who, regrettably, at age 86, died not long after.



Sir Richard WILLIAMS, accompanied by WGCDR Ted ILTON (rear) Meeting the Parade Commander ([Back](#)) (RAAF Station Laverton October 1976)

¹ There have been several changes to style as well as colour, to the uniform. Sir Richard would have been pleased to see the old RAAF- blue return in 2001.

SOME FAMILY BACKGROUND. ([Back](#))

Family sizes of up to 10 children in the late 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, were not uncommon in the Western World.

Ours, on both my maternal and paternal sides, were no exception. My mother, Rita May Hardy (deceased 1988 aged 83), was one of eight children, five sons and three daughters, as too was my father Alfred William Ilton (deceased 1996 aged 93). being one of six, a brother and four sisters.

My Dad and Mum being the eldest of their respective clans, were the first married (1924) and their two children, my sister Joan and I, were the first grandchildren of our generation and, as a result, were spoilt rotten.

Dad's father and mother were involved with the Railway Refreshment rooms in the small timber-mill Gippsland town of Nowa Nowa which nestles on the shores of Lake Tyers between the townships of Lakes Entrance and Orbost. Grandma also ran a boarding house, quite near to the Railway Station, as an income supplement.

I remember when one of the boarders was a bit keen on the bottle. Grandma was forever looking at ways and means of getting rid of him. Dad's brother Claude who was a bit of a practical joker had an idea for ridding the boarding house of the elbow bender, whose weekly custom was to go to Bairnsdale, leaving on Friday night and returning, usually half boozed, late Sunday night. Amongst the furnishings in each room of the boarding house, as well as the chamber pot under the bed, was a chest of drawers. Claude spent all one week rounding up wildish cats, one for each drawer of the boozer's drawers. For good measure, he put a huge carpet snake in the bottom drawer. This was done on the Friday evening and by late Sunday evening each of these pets were becoming restless and somewhat fractious,

Right on cue the boozing boarder arrived home late Sunday night and began opening drawers for various reasons and, as each was opened, a howling cat leapt out at him. The sight of the snake curled up in the bottom drawer, was just the last straw (drawer.?) for the inebriated star boarder who, hurriedly grabbing his bag, rushed out the door and was never seen again,.

It could well have been Dad's exposure to the Victorian Railways through his Mother's involvement with the Refreshment Rooms that led him to a career in the Railways. He started off as a Lad Porter at the Nowa Nowa Railway Station towards the end of the Great War and in the mid 20's had progressed to being a Station Master at Laverton, where Joan and I were born.

As already hinted, the RAAF Station at Laverton soon became a big part of our lives. But I digress, we are supposed to be talking about family background.

Dad's brother Claude, became a sleeper cutter and bee keeper in Nowa Nowa. The latter prevailed and working with bee-hives in Victoria/South Australia led to the Victorian Public Service as an Apiary inspector. (He retired in 1975 and died of multiple sclerosis in 1993).

Dad's sisters followed the role of most young women in those days. marrying soon after leaving school and becoming mothers and busy housewives.

Mum's family background also had a railway influence. Her father was a Railway Ganger, (track maintenance) and was stationed at Nowa Nowa where both families mixed together a lot. Eventually Mum and Dad began to walk-out together from which nuptials followed. Grandpa Hardy, in the meantime, had been transferred to the metropolitan area with a residential move to Box Hill where my Mum and Dad were married in 1924.

Mum's brothers followed career paths in various directions, the eldest Alf became involved in retailing (leather goods if my memory serves me correctly), Harry (who later died as a Japanese POW) had followed his father's footsteps into the Railways as did brothers Don and Keith. Brother Bill, who also was in the railways joined the RAAF as a Stores Hand in the mid 30's and subsequently after doing an Accountancy Course was commissioned as an Accountant Officer and eventually retired as a Squadron Leader in the early 60's.

Bill became my mentor in many ways and guided me along the right paths in my early days in the RAAF. Keith, after spending many nights studying at the Melbourne Technical College became a very accomplished plumber. Over the succeeding years, with the assistance of his lovely and capable wife Jean, he developed a most successful business. A success being bred mainly due to his skills, hard-work and genuineness.



Before leaving the family background bit, there is an interesting story about Uncle Harry, who never married and whose main interest was picking horse-race winners

Dad and Mum's Wedding, Box Hill 1924. [\(Back\)](#)

In the early 30's Dad had been transferred from Laverton to Moorabbin. Being on the Frankston line and not far from Caulfield, whenever the races were held at Caulfield, Uncle Harry would come down on the train to Moorabbin for tea with us. Quite often counting his winnings at the kitchen table. After one Caulfield Cup (1934) at which he had won two hundred pounds (a small fortune in those days) he said he would spend it all on a double set of gold false teeth (he wore upper and lower dentures) and which he would only wear at the races where he would keep grinning at the bookies each time he won. These teeth were never seen again after he joined the army at the start of WWII We assumed they were confiscated by his Japanese captors.

THE LAVERTON DAYS 1927, 1934 [\(Back\)](#)

My memory of Laverton, except for the Railway Station and the RAAF Station, is that the only other things in the town were the General Store run by some people called Silk and the local

dairy run/newsagency by the Hyde family. Only with maybe 15 or 20 houses, Laverton generally seemed quite a desolate and back-woods place and except for the Air Force, it would have been quite lack-lustre. One of the more exciting things that happened during our time there concerned the same storm as in the Prologue to this literary gem. The winds not only blew over the tank in the school yard, but also blew down every dunny in the town except ours. The popularity of ours put a premium on our toilet paper supply, (mainly old phone books in those days). I also had my first exposure as to the nature of ladies bloomers, (at age 5? do I hear you saying?), having on one occasion, while neighbourhood dunnies were still in disaray, burst into ours on an urgent mission, only to see a startled local matron seated and in action. On reflection an elderly matron seated on a country loo was not a real pretty sight.



Various photos of my sister Joan and myself with mum and dad. Circa 1927 - 1932 [\(Back\)](#)

Mum and Dad's social activities at Laverton were either over at the RAAF Station, Sergeants Mess functions, or during reciprocal home visits. We kids had so many de facto uncles and also aunties that we were never wanting for a bit of attention.

Cards at our place, Euchre and 500 I think being the main ones, were at least a weekly feature and on each occasion the visiting card players brought along some little thing for we two kids. I can remember, even to this day, some of the names, Curly Palmer, Tich Smead, Lionel Pearman, Billy Wilshire, Chick Champion and Billy Williams. The latter played Santa Clause at the RAAF Station each Christmas. (Oddly enough some of these were still serving when I joined the Air Force fifteen years hence, but more of that later).

I can though, at this stage, say something about Billy Williams, (he will also receive further mention as other events bring his name once more to the fore). He arrived at cards one night and brought for Joan and me. two beautiful identical little pink-eyed, white angora rabbits, together with a hutch. As it was our bed-time we were told that we would have to wait until the morning to play with them.

In the event we both jumped out of bed at the crack of dawn and headed for the rabbit hutch which had been placed on the ground and which did not have a floor. When we arrived we saw a small pile of dirt at the end of the hutch and only one rabbit inside; the other having obviously burrowed its way to freedom. My sister quickly said Teddy, what a shame that yours has escaped. I accepted her identification ability without question, however, on reflection it would have been more appropriate for us to have tossed a coin, drawn straws or whatever. We never saw the escaped bunny again. Nor did we have the heart to ask dear old Billy Williams to replace it. The look on his face the previous evening, when our excitement was giving him so much pleasure, was something we would not want to change. ([Back](#))

We had our first car by this time, a bullnose Renault tourer (with a rag top). It was fairly ancient the headlights having been converted from gas (acetelyne) fired to battery operation. We used the car to travel to the football matches at Point Cook, Werribee and other local venues.



Dad told the story of one Saturday afternoon when the weekly footy match was at home, (the ground being near the Officer's Mess), one of the star Air Force players for the Laverton team was apparently rostered as Duty Pilot. Although this prevented him from playing, he must have thought it not unreasonable to do some duty piloting during match-time by making low passes over the football field. According to Dad, his engine conked out and being so low, he had to force land in a paddock almost among the footballers; the plane on its nose. (Dad's picture of this was lost so I've included a look-alike picture of an AFC aircraft in France, World WWI, which ended up on-the-nose also, having lost a wheel).



I also recall manouvres between the Air Force and the Army on land opposite the railway station; horse-drawn cannons, light-horse charges and aircraft employing the tactical role of support

for the army. It was a wonderful world for me being able to watch this in fairly close proximity. Message pick-ups by low flying biplanes were also a common sight during these training exercises.

At another time, three Laverton pilots took off in Bristol Bulldogs which were tied together with streamers. They flew, inverted, over to Point Cook and then landed back at Laverton with nary a streamer broken. The pilot's names were gleaned years later over the odd ale in the Mess and, as I recall, were alleged to be: Flying Officers Fred Scherger, Dixie Chapman and Paddy Heffernan? I have never ratified this information but I can say that each became famous senior RAAF officers.

Formation Flying in early 1930's Bristol Bulldog, single seat fighters.



Christmas time at Laverton was even more exciting to us because of our being invited to take part in the RAAF Christmas Tree party and watch Santa (Cpl Billy Williams) arrive in either a Wapiti or Hawker Demon, throwing bags of lollies, attached to small

parachutes.

The assembled throng of children would jump up and down on the tarmac in front of the Hangars, (later to become Com Unit and ARDU hangars). Santa's plane would then land close to the tarmac where he would be swamped by hundreds of us excited little kids who then sat down quietly, patiently awaiting names to be called, a kiss from santa and then the present unwrap.

There were other social activities that we enjoyed and which until we obtained our first motor car were confined to visits to the Altona Beach or into Melbourne on the train or even down to Geelong also by train.

Mention of Geelong reminds me that the main Geelong to Melbourne Road then crossed the railway line between the Laverton railway station and Air Force Siding. The latter station directly serving both air force passenger and freight traffic. The road then ran between the married quarters and the Officers Mess, meandering through farm land to Werribee thence on to Geelong.

Our trips to Altona Beach were definitely, on reflection and according to tales Mum and Dad told us, journeys requiring a cut-lunch. Whilst, as the crow flies, (providing there wasn't a strong northerly), the distance to the beach was about five miles. However, not being crows we had to hoof the distance using shank's pony. We adopted a cross country route-march along what was then called, the powder line. So called because it was a private railway line which provided access from the Laverton Railway Station to a gun-powder storage facility located out in the bay immediately west of Altona. The gun-powder was conveyed from Laverton in special horse-drawn trucks. The horse actually moved along a track on the side of the rail line with a hitching line to the truck. Mum and Dad found this side-track was quite suitable for the pram in which Joan and I, together with picnic lunch, bathing togs buckets and spades etc rode in style to the beach at Altona.

We were glad to have a swim when we arrived, particularly Mum and Dad who had done all the hard work to get us there. The swim became just a distant memory for each of us by the time we got back to Laverton. As it was quite an effort we did not do it often until when Dad purchased our first car (for 25 pounds), A beach visit to Geelong, by train, was a far more leisurely affair, particularly for Mum and Dad. The pram was still a necessity at each end of the journey, but for a much less distance than the cross country to Altona.

The Eastern Beach at Geelong was a popular swimming spot at weekends and particularly on Sundays, with the various fun-of-the-fair equipment both in the water and on the sloped lawns to the sand and waters edge thus providing for a sort of self-propelled rolling into the water. Lunch was usually tomato and cucumber sandwiches, followed by a penny ice-block. On days of parent generosity we occasionally enjoyed a two-penny ice block which consisted of frozen fruit salad and cream.

In winter, when the call of the beach was not quite so strong, (although the smell of the seaweed on the Altona beach did not diminish), we railed into Melbourne and then out to Box Hill for Sunday roast with our grandparents. A real family affair too, only Uncle Alf had married at this time (to Wilmot) who later provided us with a boy and girl cousin. I can still see Grandpa carving the roast mutton at the head of the table and then the seeming ceremonious passing of

the wafer-thin slices of meat to Grandma at the other end of the table who would then load up the plates with lots of vegies (from Grandpa's garden). The roast potatoes were worth travelling all the way from Laverton to look at, smell and then savour with gleeful voices. even if Grandpa did remind Joan and me that children are to be seen and not heard, From memory, I don't think we were even allowed to ask for the salt and pepper until we were about 12 years old, We also had to seek permission to leave the table before anyone else, as sometimes children were wont to do.

The acquisition of a motor car enabled our family of four to widen our horizons a little more as far as visiting grandparents was concerned. Whilst Mum's parents had moved from Nowa Nowa to Melbourne (Box Hill) following Grandpa's transfer to the Metropolitan area, Dad's parents were still at Nowa and we made the journey to see them on a number of occasions in the old Renault.

Looking back, this was quite an adventure, 200 plus miles from Laverton. Petrol stations and mechanical assistance being few and far between in those days, (early 30's), made the trip one of some additional apprehension for Mum. Although Dad, who was good with his hands, was ready for anything.

Even starting the car, (no electric ignition then), was sometimes a bit of a hit and miss affair with the occasional reluctance on part of the starting handle which Dad had to crank to get the motor to fire. Sometimes it backfired causing an immediate reverse direction of the crank handle with resultant severe bruising of Dad's fingers and thumb, (not to mention the muttered words which I later learned were called messages of profanity or perhaps prayer,).

I can still remember the beauty of Gippsland of that period. The scenery we drove through epitomised the delights of the Australian Bush with the occasional clearing and the beginnings of a dairy farm or some other primary production enterprise in its infancy.

[\(Back\)](#)

Grandma and Grandpa's house at Nowa Nowa was built on the crest of a hill which looked down on the railway yards and station, with smoke lazily spiralling from the saw mill in the background. The house was on quite a large block of land, with an ample (colonial-style) front veranda looking down over a copse of orange trees. Joan and I not only delighted in climbing these trees but also in the eating of the juicy mouth-watering fruit.



Grandpa had the use of a nice cabin motor boat which was moored on the shores of the adjacent (1 mile away) Lake Tyers. We had some marvellous times on this boat which included watching aboriginees (from the nearly Lake Tyers mission), as they speared fish. In these same shallows, Joan and I paddled with great glee and with the occasional Aunt gambolling alongside in neck-to-knee bathing togs, as they were then called complete with bathing caps which to me, at that time, resembled an upturned bedroom chamber pot,

These same trips offered opportunities for Dad to keep in touch with his (maternal) Grandmother and Grandfather Newnham² who lived on a property at Longford on the outskirts of Sale out on the Seaspray road. As well as having a few dairy cows, Great Grandpa Newnham also ran a bacon factory on the property. I seem to remember that there was some connection between this factory and the subsequent Dandy Hams and Bacon factory at Dandenong? As a special treat, we thought, but more likely to give one of the farm hands a rest, Joan and I were allowed into the dairy on some mornings to turn the handle of the milk Separator (a machine which separated the cream from the milk, I think it was called an Alfa Laval?, a bell on the machine used to tinkle with each revolution of the handle).

As well as the likes of Smithy there were a number of famous aviatrixes also going around at that time. Amy Johnson being one of these who on one of her visits to Laverton hobnobbed with Smithy and no doubt swapped stories on their airborne globe-trotting exploits.

Also during this period, the Centenary Air Race ended at Laverton, where Scott and Black in their Comet came in winners, with the Dutch team in their DC2 (which had force landed on the Albury racecourse the night before) came in second. And, from memory, 19-year old Jimmy Melrose landed his Gypsy Moth in third place. (I can remember as a starry-eyed 7 year old, sitting on the hangar floor at Laverton watching Jimmy Melrose opening his many congratulatory telegrams).



Amy Johnson on arrival at Laverton with Kingsford-Smith and Sqn Ldr Cobby. ([Back](#))

Smithy had some difficulties in getting to England for the Centenary Air Race. In the event, he did not take part instead, some months later, in The Lady Southern Cross, decided with Mr Tom Pethybridge, to have a crack at beating Scott's race time of 71 hours. He disappeared over the Bay of Bengal, when hot on Scott's heels. Strangely enough, in the air at the same time as Smithy and over the Bay of Bengal, was Jimmy Melrose in his Percival Gull. He claimed to have seen lights from Smithy's exhaust pipe in a flight path above him and in fact volunteered to join the subsequent and fruitless, search for the two aviators.

(I seem to recall that Jimmy Melrose later died in an air crash in Tasmania, around about the mid 30's?)

² *The Newnhams of Gippsland and from many parts of the Metropolitan area, used to hold a family reunion in the park of the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg on Labour Day each year. One member of the many dozen members of families who attended, later became Police Commissioner of Queensland. It was quite a day with the traditional, at the time, fun of the fair i.e egg and spoon races, three-legged races, quoits, rounders, darts, drop the hanky, oranges and lemons and toffee apple chewing. The climax being the awarding of prizes around a camp fire where the billy was boiled and where community singing was a highlight. Unfortunately with the elders thinning out over the years and Moomba becoming a major Melbourne festival on Labour Day, the Newnham Clan reunion disappeared into History in the 1960's).*

Laverton in those early days saw, as well as the RAAF pilots of the day, many of the intrepid and blooming aviation pioneers, predominantly male but a few were female. In the early 30's



Charles Kingsford-Smith, (Smithy, as he was known throughout the world for his record breaking feats of aviation) seemed to be a regular visitor.

C.J. Melrose ([Back](#))

The Government of the day and the powers that be of the Royal Australian Air Force, granted him honorary rank of Squadron Leader. (The bar was later raised even higher with Smithy becoming Air Commodore Sir Charles Kingsford-

Smith KB AFC MC).



After their epic flight in 1928, C.E (later Sir Charles) Kingsford Smith and C.T.P Ulm were granted Honorary ranks of Squadron Leader and Flight Lieutenant. (The famous Southern Cross is in the background). ([Back](#))

So it came to pass, in 1934, the year of the Melbourne Centenary celebrations, my Dad was transferred from Laverton to Moorabbin. to again be Station Master. As mentioned earlier, Moorabbin being on the Frankston line and about 15 miles from Melbourne.

It was probably the saddest day of my young life as the removal van drew away from our railway house at Laverton which had been my home for the first seven years of my life. The sadness was not for the leaving of the (rather basic) Railway house, but more the fact that no longer would my eyes be continually sky-ward eagerly watching for the familiar red white and blue RAAF roundel on the gleaming silver aeroplanes as they flew overhead, seemingly all day long.

I did though, even at that young age, leave with the resolve that, one day I would become an Air Force pilot.

THE MOORABBIN DAYS 1934, 1936 ([Back](#))

There was no Railway house to move into at Moorabbin, so a rental proposition was the only option. Oddly enough, in one of the paddocks near the railway line, about half a mile from the Railway Station, was a nice brick and tile house sitting on its own with a large sign in whitewash, For Rent thirty shillings per week. That might sound cheap but actually it wasn't, the basic wage at that time was about 3 pounds per week (or 60 shillings). Anyway Dad took a liking to the house and its proximity to the Railway Station. It was the only house in the street at the time, Fawkner Street, a dirt (sandy) road, with thistles and volcanic rocks strewn around in the adjacent paddocks, (where we were to excitedly pick both mushrooms and blackberries in season). The only feature resembling our Laverton house, was that it also had an outside (unsewered) loo, or dunny as they were called in Laverton-town. To say we were disappointed about this was an understatement. Moving to the city area surely had meant also a sewered lav?

The first dramatic event, when settled into our new abode at Moorabbin, was the demise of the Renault and the purchase of a more (although well used) modern vehicle, circa 1920 or thereabouts, in the form of a Swift Roadster, with again a rag top. Roadsters in those days virtually meant that the back seat was out in the open and it was referred to as a Dickey Seat and this is where Joan and I had to travel on our many jaunts in the Swift. It was really back too. In fact it was out in the open in that area now referred to as the boot. Not sure even now as to the reason for the term dickie although those with R rated minds may think along the lines of some physical aspect of one of the canoodlers.

During the more clement times of southern Victoria, we enjoyed being out in the dickie seat. However, in winter it was bitterly cold. It was so cold late one night when coming back from one of our regular visits to Box Hill that we crouched down and closed the lid. This action would not have been particularly noticeable from the warm enclosure of the front seat, where Mum was more than likely dozing and Dad was busily occupied with the business of driving and neither of them noticing the premature closing of the lid.

On arrival home, with both parents alighting at the same time, there was a concurrent loud exclamation of: My God, the kids, they've probably suffocated. On soon discovering this was not the case, the usual salutary punishment of a smack on the rear-end followed.

The good old Swift gave us good service and will be mentioned again here and there at least until World War II when private motoring with strict petrol rationing determined a quite stringent essential use only policy. Dad's four gallons per month did certainly not take us much further than to church on Sundays?

The next dramatic event, for me anyway, was one which was to become an almost predictable part of my psychy during the next few years and which would always be accompanied with another Railway-move. A move meant starting at yet another new school, Laverton, although being a relatively small and single teacher school, from memory 30 or so pupils, was not quite as likely to harbour a school bully or inveterate mischief-maker. However, this had not been the case. Even at the Laverton school, there was such an abhorrent creature, as I now think of him when recollecting my early school years, always preying on the little kids and with, at the very

least, threatening glances. For some reason I was more of a target for his bullying ways than any of the other smaller kids. When we were not in class he seemed to watch my every move?

I was in first grade. He, I think, relatively senior in the third grade. His favourite trick was pushing me over at every opportunity often followed with his sitting on me and then tying my boot laces together in undo-able knots. Not being able to undo the knots and so unable to take off my boots, I was forced to hop around the play-ground until someone helped, usually my sister. I was not game to tell the teacher in case the bully followed me home after school to inflict me with a sometimes blood-nose belting. On reflection the thought of getting away from this bully, was the only reason that I was pleased to leave Laverton, with the hope that a similar ruffian would not be encountered at my new school.

My Moorabbin expectations were soon put to the test and soon changed to disillusionment as even on the first day it became apparent that this school too, was not going to be any different with regards to the school-bullying element. Worse still, being a much bigger school than Laverton, maybe 100, 200 pupils, there were more bullies and their misdeeds were easier to be entered into and well away from teacher vigilance. Many of the kids, although not bullies themselves, did a lot of urging on. Kids being bullied and not retaliating, became fair game.

Our time at Moorabbin was still very much within the Depression Years. We were lucky that Dad had a Government job and could be sure of his (small) pay each week. All sorts of economies and thrift had to be exercised in the average family home, including, among other things, children needing to be clothed and fed.

As far as clothing was concerned, hand-me-downs (a fore-runner of Op Shop philosophy) were common practice with family financial management. Girls' clothing that had been grown-out-of, rather than worn-out, was handed down to younger sisters. Similarly boys to younger brothers. In my case with only a boy and a girl in the family and I being the younger, there was no suggestion that I wear Joan's hand-me-down dresses, or (God forbid), bloomers. However, foot-wear was a different thing altogether. In the days about which I speak, leather sandals were a popular school footwear style. However there was quite a difference between girl-style sandals to that of boys. But guess what? My sister's sandals never wore out she just grew-out of them. The fact that they were not boys' sandals did not come into the economic equations of the day. There is still plenty of wear left in them and they are sandals anyway, so young Teddy can wear them to school can't he. You don't need to guess much more as to what the school bullies thought of this mixed dressing. The term sissy quickly comes to mind followed by taunts of sitting down to pee as well. Although I wasn't the only boy in the school being a victim of this type of clothing/footwear economy, this did not run to the case of there being safety in numbers. The contrary was the case as witnessed by gang-bullying taking place and making it worse than the previous individual Laverton bullying.

A further problem of being in the eye of the school bully, was the Railway transfer policy of the day which somehow hardly ever provided for a staff transfer to take place at the end of a school year. Dad was usually moved at any time during the year when, naturally enough, my first day at the new school as a new kid, became far more obvious and therefore a constant and easy target. School days at Moorabbin did not provl'd a lot of joy for me. Also the two to three mile walk to school from home, along what was then called Point Nepean Road, could be an uncomfortable walk in both cold and hot weather. (do I hear you saying, and in sandals that were perhaps ill-fitting??.).

The times away from school were more enjoyable, which included trips in our new Swift, not only to Box Hill (in the first year) and later to Yannathan where Grandpa Hardy was transferred in 1935. Also Grandma and Grandpa Ilton were still at Nowa Nowa to whom we visited every few months. The Yannathan visits were full of excitement for both Joan and me. Like most country railwaymen, Grandpa had the usual chooks, a cow and even better still a pony for the children still at school, namely Auntie Alma, my Mum's youngest sister and Uncle Keith her youngest brother, both of whom were in their early teens. Keith's bed-room at Yannathan was a tent out in the back yard, which I shared with him during our visits.

I guess this was my first exposure to an erstwhile sleeping under the stars and no doubt my, not much later, love of camping. Being a railway house in which they lived, it was not all that large and a lot of doubling-up i.e head-and-toe sleeping was necessary, which was not uncommon in most large family situations in those days.

Keith and Alma were more like brother and sister to Joan and me. They taught us how to ride the pony, a lovely grey called Trixy. I remember so well that when either of us fell off during the riding lessons, Trixy would stop and lick our face as if to say are you OK?

As well as the horse riding there was a river about a mile away from Grandpa's house to which we travelled for a swim on a small rail trike. This was a Ganger's vehicle which had a push pull action and was a lot of fun. Trains were not a problem as the Yannathan station and line had been closed for some time. (Grandpa was working with his gang on the nearby Kooweerup line).

The swimming hole was part of a river/creek over which the old railway bridge passed. Keith or Alma would park the trike on the bridge and the four of us then would slip and slide down the grassy bank to the water's edge. Although it had its deep parts, there were also delightful shallow parts in the swimming hole where we had lots of fun. Neither Joan or I could swim at that time.

On those occasions when it was not the right sort of day for swimming, Aunty Alma used to set up a school room in the Station Master's office, which then had been deserted for some time and she would act out the role of the School Marm, but generally it was all in fun.

I mentioned on the previous page a future love of camping. Well it happened not long after my first experience of sleeping in Uncle Keith's tent.

Holidays during the depression years were pretty much few and far between at least for all working families and, as my Dad used to say at the time, holidays in far away places are pretty much the realm of the rich.

He soon made holidays for us a reality, keeping the venues at the same time within our meagre financial means. The best way to do this was to go away camping. So within a period of a few months he put together a camping outfit. i.e a tent, folding beds and other folding furniture, camp ovens, primus stoves, Coolgardie safes

(A Coolgardie safe (right) was a rectangular structure covered in hessian with a door and shelves, usually hung from the bough of a tree, with a water tray on top from which were hung strips of damp towelling which then dampened the hessian and in turn kept the inside of the safe relatively cool).

As petrol was relatively expensive, the travelling distance to the camping ground needed to be not too far distant from home. Dad selected beautiful Balnarring, as it was then. A delightful little seaside village on the shores of Western Port Bay with a camping ground among the ti-tree and right on the water's edge as well as being within walking distance of the local store and safe swimming. Fishing in Western Port bay in those days was almost a case of the fish committing suicide. Whether casting in a line off the beach or from several jetties (Flinders for one) each in reasonably close proximity (Back) to the Balnarring camp-site. A feed was always guaranteed.



Mum was a very keen fisher-woman, knew what hooks to put on the line, what bait to use and how to hook them. Speaking of bait, I remember one afternoon we were to fish for leather-jacket off the Flinders pier. Mum had brought some of the squid that we had been using for bait over the last few days and which, without refrigeration being available, had become a bit on the nose and tough as well, To her chagrin she realised that she had left her bait knife back at the camp and was quite bewildered as to how she would cut the bait into strips. An old salt sitting and fishing quite close to us could see Mum's dilemma. He didn't have a knife either (he was using white bait which was quite soft), so he picked up a piece of this rancid squid, shoved it between his teeth and commenced to bite off strips of bait. Mum quickly got into gear by reeling in leather jacket after leather jacket. She was convinced that it was the old salt's spittle that did the trick, (or the rum bottle from which he sipped at every opportunity).

I am reminded of another humorous incident concerning our camping equipment. Whilst a camp fire was almost a must, even if only for warmth on the cold nights or for keeping away the mosquitoes, it was also handy for cooking but had the shortcoming of taking a while to become hot enough to boil the billy.

To compensate for this Dad had purchased a new primus stove for use on camps. For readers who are not aware of a primus stove, it is a piece of brass equipment about the size of the average saucepan, has small legs, a tank for kerosene on which is affixed a small pump, Above all this is a sort of stove-top for the kettle. The actual burner has a rim around it, upon which for pre-ignition, metholated spirits is poured and lit. The flaming metho then heats up the burner and then when hot enough, the pump is vigorously pushed until a stream of kerosene passes out of a small hole in the burner, ignites and voila, there is a quite hot gas fire. During the metho burning phase, if not in the know, it would appear as if the stove was out of control and about to blow-up. Anyway this is what Grandpa Hardy thought when Dad had the primus on the kitchen stove at home for a test. He had lit the metho, which usually took a few minutes to do its job and had gone outside for something. Grandpa, in the meantime, walked into the kitchen, spotted the flaming Primus and with quick resolve to save the kitchen from catching fire, quickly picked up the unsuspecting primus, opened the wire door and hurled Dad's brand new pride-and-joy as far into the back-yard as he could. In the event it smashed into the side of the fowl-house and landed in the garden, slightly bent and without its legs. Dad was not

amused and no doubt was casting aspersions about the parentage of his father-in-law. However, being quite good with his hands, he soon had the primus back into reasonable shape and it boiled many a kettle and other types of small cooking for many years.

There were no caravans in those days. All campers were in tents, most kept coming back to the same spot two or three times a year and on each occasion it was like a family reunion. As well as the men-folk taking turns to talk about the big-one that got away and the ladies talking about who was having a baby next or the price of groceries; sing-alongs around the camp fires at night were a regular and most happy feature. With possums scurrying around in the tree-tops above us, owls hooting, curlews calling and quite often a moon above, they were quite marvellous occasions.

Unfortunately no photos have survived for illustrative purposes in this book. Photos were usually taken on the ubiquitous box Brownie. Although Dad had a Kodak, folding bellows, camera which took great pictures but those reminiscent of Balnarring have been lost in antiquity, Suffice to say, the fairly hum-drum life in Moorabbin during the depression were lightened by the camps at Balnarring where we spent so many happy days coupled with pleasurable anticipation for the next.

A real highlight of our days at Moorabbin, was the decision made by the Council to sewer the area in which we were living. The expression of the day of, going down the back really meant a visit to the loo which was usually down the back. The obvious reasons being to have an unsewered loo as far away from the house as possible. Other draw-backs of this arrangement were that such visits in the winter and worse still at night, were quite often through driving rain, wind etc. This is when the chamber pot or the guzunder (goes-under-the-bed) came into its own for nocturnal needs,

We had a big back veranda and the owner of the house arranged to have the sewer line put in at one end of the veranda, where a quite commodious loo was built. Mum was so taken with it and as it was around Christmas time, she even sat out there doing some of her Christmas cards. Flushing was done with a length of chain from the cistern perched above the pedestal. We warned Mum, too much more of that Christmas-card business and we will pull the chain on you,

As with Laverton, football was still of great interest to us. Moorabbin had a team in what was, if I remember correctly, the Mordialloc league. Although I have not revisited the Moorabbin football ground since those days, it is quite possible it could be the same ground that the St Kilda AFL club uses today.

Although, Dad being on the Victorian Railways, was one of the lucky ones who held a job right through the depression, the pay was not all that good, only a couple of pounds per week. As a result, considerable thrift was needed to make ends meet. I can remember we would drive up to the Glenhuntly market on Saturday mornings and fill up a hessian sugar bag with the week's provisions and still have some change out of ten shillings.

The meat purchased quite often included a pigs cheek, pigs trotters and sheep's tongues, meat which Mum generally boiled and made into brawn (potted meat). There is little doubt that the most unforgettable highlight of our lives when living at Moorabbin was the City of Melbourne's contribution to the Centenary celebrations of 1934. I can still remember quite vividly the

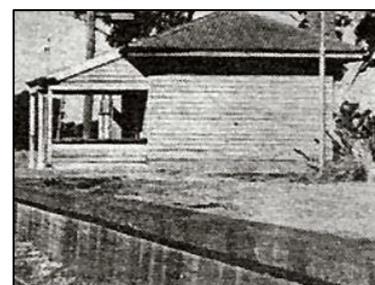
festooning of Princes Bridge and St Kilda Road right through to the Shrine of Remembrance. Additionally, the street light- poles and tramway stanchions bedecked in a fashion resembling, to me anyway, the centre-piece of beautifully decorated cakes. Their Royal Highnesses the Duke (right) and Duchess of Gloucester were the guests of honour and were omnipresent at each venue which became the focus over each day of the celebrations. Much to my joy, RAAF aircraft, (about 50?), which took part in the Centenary air display at Laverton, made frequent and relatively low-level fly-passes over the city of Melbourne and the bay-side suburbs.



A CHANGE OF SCENE, TALLYGAROPNA 1936 – 1939. [\(Back\)](#)

Our lives at Moorabbin had continued in much the same style until 1936 when Dad received his marching orders for his next station-master assignment at the small Goulburn Valley town of Tallygaroopna, (about 120 miles north east of Melbourne). Although having at this time, reached the maturing age of 9, I was unable to pronounce the name of our new home-town let alone spell it. I did know that it was not far from Shepparton. By way of explanation, our frequent moves went with the territory of the Victorian Railways. The policy being, particularly in the traffic branch, station-masters had to move, on promotion to the next higher grade, or forgo the promotion and stay-put in the one place. Many chose to do the latter. Dad's ambition was to continue to be promoted with each move, eventually leading to a more prestigious Railway Station. Tallygaroopna was thus well down on the pecking order, but did eventually, lead years later, to his being promoted to the VR top job as Station Master at Spencer Street railway station in Melbourne.

Tally railway station – 1936.



I remember the drive up-to Tallygaroopna in the old Swift motor car along the Hume Highway for most of the trip and, when nearing our destination, the scenery changing from open and lightly timbered, grazing, paddocks to one of mile after mile of golden shimmering wheat in the large paddocks. The Tallygaroopna railway station had become in fact the busy rail head for the district's annual wheat harvest distribution.

Coincidental with our move to the north eastern parts of Victoria, was also Grandpa Hardy's transfer to Benalla, between Seymour and Wangaratta, a distance of about 50 or so miles from Tally and so within easy driving distance for a continuance of our reciprocal visits which started from Laverton ten years earlier. We always timed our visits to arrive at Nanna and Grandpas in time for the roast dinner on a Sunday. In the initial stages (1936/37) most of their family were still at home and meal times were still a big occasion. With Grandpa still carving the roast at the head of the table and plates being passed back-wards and forwards to Nanna for the placement of vegetables from big steaming china serving bowls. We usually stayed for tea, which comprised cold meat and salad followed by apple pie smothered with scalded cream, a process derived from leaving a pot of milk gently simmering on the back of the stove, which after a time formed a thick skin of cream which was something delicious.

Washing and drying the dishes was also a family affair. After the evening meal, as soon as they

were done, we would gather around the piano, (later pianola, punched music on a roll) and sang popular songs of the day, many still lingering from WW1, A Rose that Grows in No-man's Land, Long Long Trail A-winding, Mexicali Rose Tipperary, Pack Up Your Troubles etc. The music on the piano stand and the words were illuminated by two candles set in brass candle sticks which were part of the piano, We did never leave for home until after a coffee and sponge cake supper, the coffee brewing in a large kettle which continually simmered over the open fire in the lounge (music) room.

As will have been noted from the earlier matters of school days, where I had moved from the very small school of Laverton to the much larger Moorabbin campus, (some hundreds of kids), I was more than pleased to find that the Tallygaroopna School, No 3067 on the register of the Victoria Education Department, was again comparatively small with only 40 pupils. Still remembering though that size was not indicative of bullying level which was very much in mind when my first day at Tally school arrived.

A day which, adding to my anticipated discomfort, had a 9 am temperature of 100⁰F degrees together with a hot northerly gale. The locals would describe this as being 100 in the water bag, The only things busy on such a hot day seemed to be the myriad of flies continuously buzzing around my face and the two teachers trying to organise the start of a new school year.



Tallygaroopna school, 1936. Joan in the 3rd row, 6th from left, me front row, 5th from left. ([Back](#))

I could not believe the fact that by 3.30pm on that first afternoon when the school bell rang for close of classes for the day, there had been nary a sign of a school bully, On reflection, this complete absence of bullying could well have been due to most of the kids being from large hard-working, good living and (as I learned later) salt-of-the-earth farming families.

Whilst bullying was not a characteristic of the boys of Tally school, various degrees of mischief certainly were still about and often resulted in the required number of salutary cuts with the headmaster's leather strap. One act of mischief concerned the dropping of a piece of carb'd in the inkwell on the table of the unsuspecting lady teacher, Miss Nita Montgomery. Carb'd was a substance used at the time for dropping into tanks of suitable gas-making liquid and which was then piped to overhead lights in buildings or even street lights. The placement in a small ink-



well and its immediate boiling-over could be likened to the eruption of Mt Vesuvius whilst poor Miss Nita fell quietly in a faint to the floor which caused quite an uproar in the little class-room, together with the ire of the Head.

Tallygaroopna school building, 1936

[\(Back\)](#)

With the drama-less first day at school quickly receding into the distance, our Tally life started to unfold. We had moved into the Station Master's house, not a salubrious edifice, (below) but Dad was quick to build a fowl-run so that we could enjoy fresh eggs as well as providing a means of disposing of kitchen scraps. He purchased a dozen or so white leghorn pullets together with a rooster and a bantam hen and rooster for my sister Joan and me.



Station Master's house, Tallyroopna, 1936.

[\(Back\)](#)

Whilst we already had a cat, Tibbie and Bunny (the remaining white Angora rabbit from Laverton), we also soon had a lovely black spaniel dog we called nigger, which of course would be most politically incorrect these days. Dad

then picked up a nice Guernsey cow at the local cattle sales with fresh milk and cream now added to the fresh eggs (and any fresh bunny meat brought home from nigger's run in the fields). Whilst a pony could well have been next, this did not eventuate. Instead, a rescued baby lamb whose mother had been killed on the railway line became another of our pets. So domesticated in fact, it was not unusual when fully grown for it to sit up in the front seat of our car with Dad when he was going for a short run up to the local village shops.

This introduction to various animals on the domestic scene was pretty much par for the course in those days particularly for people who lived in small country towns. The cow and the chooks provided a new interest for both my sister Joan and me. The cow had a calf a month or two after we got her which we called Daisy and became very much my pet.

My sister had named all of the chooks and often sat in the hen house when they were laying their eggs which she liked collecting while they were still warm. It was soon after, that the Tally School started a Young Farmers Club with suitable animals being potential Show entrants at the annual Shepparton Agricultural Show. I can remember taking first prize for Daisy as the

best Guernsey calf in the Show and Joan also getting a first for the best rooster.

Alf Ilton, Stationmaster 1936 ([Back](#))

I have already indicated that Tallygaroopna was a large wheat growing area and that the rail-head served as the main bulk distribution centre for the annual wheat harvest stock-pile, which consisted of huge stacks of bagged wheat, temporarily roofed with galvanised iron with hessian hung down on all sides. This method of stock-piling was subsequently replaced by large silos.

Whilst to me at the time, a mere 9 year old, Tally looked like any small country town in Victoria, there were signs of days of a former glory on both sides of Victoria Street the main (and only?) street. There were a number of dis-used shops, one a rather large empty department style store, a grand bank and residence but no longer used as a bank (in fact the Railway Ganger and his family lived there during our time). These were a legacy of the great depression of 20's and early 30's.



The three main pivotal points of the town were the memorial hall (left - a Shepparton community-assisted project honouring the fallen local comrades during the Great War of 1914-18), the local pub (licensee Reddy O'Keefe) and the Railway Station.

([Back](#))

The memorial hall was of particular interest to us kids because of the excitement created therein by the wonderful concerts, various exhibitions and our first view of moving pictures and talkies. In a separate room at the rear of the hall, a typical World War 1

trench had been constructed in a just-as-it-was-in-France mould and which had particular significance for the annual Anzac Day services in the Hall.

The pub came into its own every Saturday afternoon and during the wheat harvesting period when thirsty wheat lumpers used to retreat to the pub bar to slake their thirst. Many humorous episodes, some of which no doubt would become folk-lore, came out of this little pub. One such story concerned a Saturday afternoon regular, who would drive into town in his horse and gig. After some heavy imbibing, he would leave his return home entirely to his horse who knew the programme so well.



My recollection of this episode, as told by the locals at the time and which I'd heard my Dad narrate on more than one occasion, concerned a New Year's Eve prank by a couple of the local lads. As was customary, old Bill as he was known, stumbled out of the pub to his horse which he had left harnessed to the gig in the earlier shade of some pepper corn trees in the pub yard. Old Bill usually dozed along the lane leading to his small farm. (there was no danger of vehicular collisions as cars were pretty much of a rarity [\(Back\)](#) on country lanes in those days). The lads rode ahead on their bikes to Bill's farm entrance where the horse dutifully stopped at the wire gate which Bill had closed on the way out. Bill was still asleep at this stage, so the two lads, quietly unharnessed the horse, opened the gate, led the horse through, closed the gate again and then poked the gig's shafts, through the gate and re-harnessed the horse. Bill eventually awoke and sized up the situation which seemed the horse had just stopped at the gate. He could not understand why the horse would not budge on his command to gee-up. The young lads, who had settled down to await Bill's (rude) awakening and having enjoyed the old chap's consternation, then



reversed the earlier procedure and led the horse and gig to Bill's front door and wished the old gent happy new year.

Main St, Tallygaroopna 1936 [\(Back\)](#)

Another funny episode of about the same period concerned The Victoria Street Snake Affair and a sequel to which labelled my Dad, The Pied Piper of Tallygaroopna.

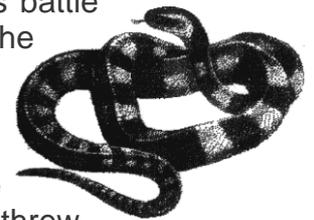
On most winter Saturday afternoons in Tallygaroopna, in the early 1930's, if a footie game was not being played on the town Oval most of the local kids filled in the time by yabbing in the dam behind the Goods Shed at the Railway Station.

On this particular Saturday's yabbing at the "Tally Dam and because my sister, Joan, had been bitten on the foot by a snake the previous week-end while walking up to the Post Office, there was a strong concern for the likelihood of there being a snake under every blade of grass around the dam,

I soon tired of my yabbing efforts, so decided to walk around the perimeter of the dam. I looked into one of the yabby holes in the side of the dam and to my surprise saw the head of the biggest snake I had ever seen. Knowing my Dad would be concerned about this (particularly as he still had the taste of the poison in his mouth from sucking Joan's foot the previous week-end- although to this day said it was the taste of her dirty foot) I raced across to the Station where Dad was on afternoon shift, to raise the snake alarm.

On telling him of the location of this monstrous reptile, he quickly exclaimed I will have to get a gun from somewhere. He immediately thought of Tom Crawford, (the Railway Ganger who was living in the old Bank house in the main street). Racing toward the township, such a desperate sight- (dressed in his best Station Master's uniform with braid and gold buttons) had never been seen on a sleepy hot Saturday afternoon in Tally. Within minutes he was being followed by every kid in town and then adults who had been awakened from their Saturday afternoon nap by the excitement.

Tom Crawford was so impressed by the apparent urgency of the occasion that he loaded both barrels of a shot gun which he quickly handed to Dad, who, with coat tails flying and gun at the high port hurried towards the dam and at the same time working on his battle strategy. Recalling that Bert Canet kept his flat-bottomed boat on the waters of the Station dam so, on arrival at the dam seeking directions from frightened little me as to which hole the snake was lurking for a strike at a passing foot, Dad jumped into the boat, plied his way to the aforementioned yabby hole, gently slid both barrels of the gun into the hole and with great alacrity he let fly with triggers in unison. The recoil threw him backwards into the boat which charged immediately sternwards across the dam making waves akin to the recent launching of the Queen Mary.



When the smoke cleared, the tussocks settled and the gathered throng composed themselves after being spell-bound with the heroic, but less-than dignified posture, of the saviour of the dam, all gingerly gathered around the gaping hole to examine the remains of this dastardly reptile. And what did lay before their eyes- a headless tiger snake?,- a badly battered large brown snake?, NO,, something far worse than these (at least as far as the safety of my buttocks was concerned) because there laying in the double-barrel-blown crater was only the shattered remains of the BIGGEST BULL FROG ever to grace the waters of a Tally Dam.

A new race then started, me trying to beat my angered (and understandably embarrassed) father whose only thoughts were to tan my hide. If for no other reason than for my making a fool of one of Tally's leading Citizens, (Citizens who in those days were restricted to Publicans, Bank Managers, Book-makers, Parish Priests, Head Masters and Station Masters).

For many many years, hearing the call of a bullfrog, Dad's eyes would glaze as he thought of not only of Tallygaroopna but also the people of that great little town who remember him as both the local Pied Piper and a latter day Vulgar Boatman .

Although Dad was kept busy at the Railway Station, where he had the assistance of an Operating Porter and a Lad Porter, Sundays were always days of rest, at least from the Station and these were the times when we did things as a family. In addition to the reasonably frequent trips to our Grandparents at Benalla, Sunday was also the day when we would often go fishing, either in the Goulburn river or at a not-too-distant Lake (or was it a Loch) Gowrie. This was a favourite fishing spot and abounded with English Perch, or more popularly referred to as Red Fin. They were fun to catch and great to eat.

As there was always a chance of catching a Murray Cod or two, who preferred live bait, the best bait were small English carp which were quite easily netted in the small irrigation channel that flowed past our house.

Both Mum and Dad were extremely keen on fishing and with the earlier exposure that I had to fishing, on our camping trips to Balnarring, I too became quite keen and managed to catch my share. My sister was less interested but always found things to interest her in the vegetation around the banks near where we would fish.

In those days, with the limited number of motor cars around and very few owned by families, Sunday School picnics were always a much-looked-forward-to annual event. Usually the mode of transportation was a furniture van, which proved ideal when not cluttered up with furniture. Most had a number of windows in the sides and should the weather turn foul at the picnic spot, the van was quite cavernous and would allow the continuation of the picnic programme of games etc.

Another popular activity, confined though to autumn and early winter, was the gathering of mushrooms. Often after school when there would be just enough light to gather a bucketful for breakfast on toast the next day. At times, when they were absolutely prolific, Dad and Mum would help us and we would send them in boxes to Melbourne to the Victoria Markets and get five shillings a box. (Which would buy quite a bit of petrol for our car as well as other things).

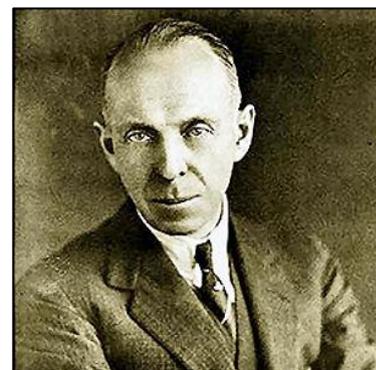
During our first winter in Tally we were able to continue our earlier interest in Australian Rules Football. Tallygaroopna had a team in the Shepparton League. The grounds for the away games were not all that far away from Tally so we were able to go to most matches.

Church and Sunday School, were a virtual weekly event and both Joan and I were confirmed in the Church of England while living at Tally.

Probably one of the most exciting things that happened to me in the first year that we were in Tallygaroopna, was the return of one of the town's leading business-men, Simon Lang, from a business trip to Melbourne in an aeroplane which landed in the paddock opposite the railway station. I of course, could not get close enough to the plane when it came to a stop and fondled it as if it was a beautiful animal.

The pilot did a number of joy flights as they were called in those days, I seem to remember it was twenty shillings for twenty minutes. I could only watch and wish.

Another highlight of the year, particularly being a member of a railwayman's family, was the annual visit of the Chief Commissioner of Railways. In the days of which I speak it was Sir Harold Clapp (right). He would hook the Commissioner's carriage on to the normal passenger service train, which to me was something which I'd expect the King and Queen of England to travel in. We were allowed in to have a look at the sumptuousness of the carriage, but with the usual warnings of not to touch. He would make a magnanimous gesture to us two kids by giving us each a shiny apple, which now, whenever I eat a Gravenstein I still think of Harold Clapp and his most patronising manner with little kids. ([Back](#))



As I write this particular page, Christmas 2003, I am mindful of an event that occurred during our first Christmas at Tally which was December 1937, (I was nearly 11) and, which caused some excitement, laughter, distress to Dad and some cross-country trekking.



Some weekend visitors to Tally

*G'pa Hardy, Ilma & Don (rear)
Joan, Edna, Nana, Nana Ilton,
Dad, Claude and me.*

To set the scene for this, could be described as something of a pantomime. It was a hot morning, (about 100⁰F in the water-bag) on New Year's eve 1937. I was sitting on the back step

outside the kitchen when Mum came out with what I could see was the New Year's day Pudding. I knew this because it was in an aluminium steamer. Mum always made two puddings before Christmas, one in a muslin cloth in the traditional manner for Christmas and she would then put the pudding mixture that was left over into an aluminium steamer, cook it on the same day as the Christmas pudding and then put it away for eating on New Year's day remember also, there was no home refrigeration back in 1937. Mum said to me, Teddy, I've got a small job you might like to do for me. What's that Mum I said. She replied: well we won't be able to

eat this plum pudding, the weather has been so hot that it has fermented and is mouldy. But as you know, she continued I always put eight threepences in it, the same as I do for the Christmas pud.



*G'pa Hardy, Don my Dad, Keith
and me*

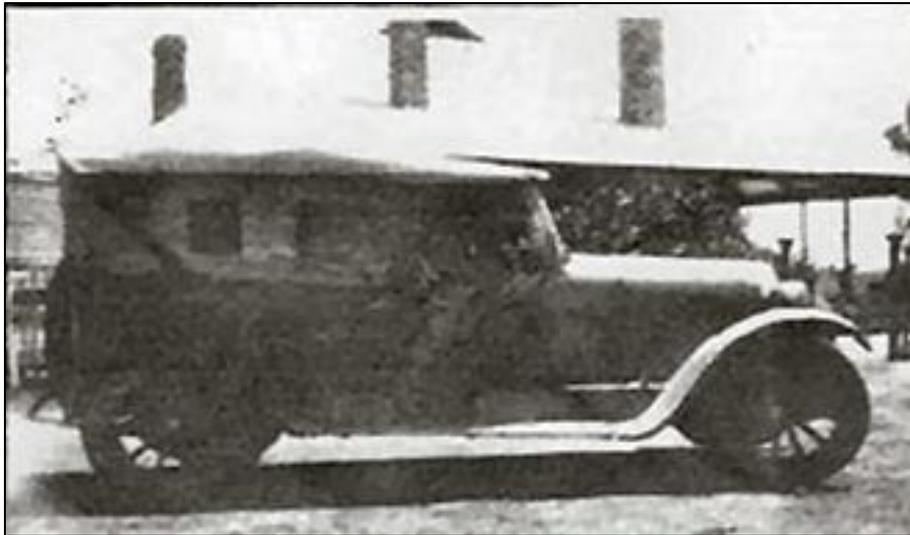
So if you would like to dig around in it with your fingers

and take out all the threepences, you can have four and your sister Joan can have the other four. I quickly said righto, Mum, that'll be no trouble, I'll do it right away. The keen-ness in my voice was a direct result of my doing some quick mental arithmetic and calculating that four three-pences was the equivalent of two weeks pocket money which Dad gave Joan and me.

It was really a piece of cake finding the tray bits as we used to called them, they were all covered in bits of pudding but that would soon wash off and which I would be more than happy to do.

As I recovered each coin I placed it alongside me on the concrete step. I had one to go and with glee, out it soon came in my sticky fingers. I went to place it alongside the other seven

when I noticed that Nigger the dog had snuck up and sat down beside me, What I also quickly noticed was that there was no sign of the seven trey bits but Nigger was licking his chops with considerable satisfaction and pleasure, (A threepence by the way, was a bit smaller in size to todays' five cent piece.).



I couldn't believe it, I called out to Mum she raced out and went immediately into convulsive laughter, I wasn't thinking about laughing, I was almost crying.

A motor car like Grandpa's Chandler ([Back](#))

She told me she would make it up to me during the week (and not a word to your father) and in the meantime

to throw the remains of the pudding into the chook yard.

Having done this, I suddenly remembered my nature study lessons at school and the principles and reasons for defecation (I couldn't spell it at that time tho'). So I thought if I followed Nigger around, over the next day or so there could be an easy but no doubt messy, silver recovery operation put into the equation.



([Back](#))

In the meantime, having thrown the remains to the chooks as directed and not knowing the time elements in respect of a dog's digestive and/or waste system, I kept an eye on Nigger's movements (to coin a phrase.) It was just on lunch-time when Dad came rushing in to the kitchen from the station crying out, my chooks are dead, my chooks are dead, they're all dead, flat on their backs with their legs pointing to the sky.

Mum and I raced out to the fowl yard and sure enough there were all the white-leghorns on their backs as graphically described by Dad - they were dead alright but dead drunk. They recovered as soon as the heat of the sun diminished in mid-afternoon and Dad was more than relieved to know the cause and not the least bit interested in the silver trail that I was to follow.

Although it did take several days and in the event, I must have missed some of Nigger's toilet visits, because I only ever recovered five of the missing seven threepences. I didn't share them with my sister Joan either. I knew she would not want them if I told her where the threepences had been.

Also, as I did not have the use of a camera in those days, there is no photographic evidence to provl'd the more graphic details for inclusion in the pages of this book, although readers will agree the story does contain the elements of excitement, laughter and distress.

It was during about mid-1938, that my life became a little more exciting, (than that described above), now 11 years old and looking for a little more pocket money, I heard that the country bread-carter Mappy Collins, (he drove an International panel-van for the Tallygaroopna baker

Simon Lang), was looking for a Saturday and school holiday gate-opener.

The system in country Victoria in those days was that bread and groceries were delivered to farms two or three times per week, it was known as the rounds. It was the bane of the life of the bread carters to have to stop at every farm gate (probably 80 or 100 in a days' round) open the gate, get back in, drive through, get out of the van again, close the gate etc etc. It was also very time consuming. I applied for the Saturday job and if I was satisfactory at that would also have a go at the three times per week during the school holidays.

As it turned out, Mappy and I got on like a house on fire, I became quite skilled at jumping out of the van before it stopped, opening the gate quickly, closing it again just as quickly and jumping back in as Mappy slipped into first gear. By the time that the first lot of school holidays came along I had the job for that period too and also a few free pies each trip,

On reflection, as well as the most welcome five shillings per round Mappy used to pay me, the other benefits were not only getting to know each of the farmers and their families on whom we called but it also provided me with opportunities of learning how the other half lives. At the same time, the meeting of so many different personalities was a life's lesson in itself. Additionally, we could never forget the many occasions when our arrival at a farm in the van often timed in nicely with a batch of scones, cakes or biscuits just coming out of the oven. This to be accompanied by the ubiquitous farm kitchen's cuppa helped to make many a day.

Mappy also taught me, at 12 years of age mind you, how to drive the panel-van. He would stop in a paddock, push the back of the seat forward and jam an empty petrol can between the back of the seat and the cabin of the van. This procedure allowing me to sit forward sufficiently behind the wheel and to reach the brake and clutch pedal. It wasn't long before I would even drive up from the gate to a farm-house and back to the gate again on the way out. These driving escapades never continued on to the main roads, however, as Mappy used to say, Teddy, if ever we get stuck because of a problem with me, there's little doubt that you would get us home safely.

So life went on happily for me at good old Tally as we called it. My sister Joan, being three years older than me, was becoming, now in her early teens, the young lady of the town. Childhood pursuits were no longer for her. And, as events transpired, it was probably just as well for her that she had reached this stage.

PARENTS SEPARATE. [\(Back\)](#)

The events I refer to, and sadly at the time (mid 1939) and of course on many times of sad reflection since those days, my Mum and Dad decided to separate. This came as a great shock to my sister and to me. To this day I cannot remember any particular event or occasion which would have led to such a happening?

It seemed to Joan and I that our world was about to fall apart!

The immediate effect of this decision was Mum's moving down to Melbourne and Dad staying put to keep the home fires burning and looking to the day to day care of we two kids! I am not

quite sure as to how he planned the immediate future except that any moves from Tally on his part, should take into account the school year (of 1939) which still had a couple of months to run.

Marriage break-ups, and pending divorce action, were something of a social rarity at that time, with the associated (real or imagined) stigma that prevailed with the people concerned and the breaking of the community bonding in which they and their children had played such a big part.

Understandably then, I do not think that Dad wanted us to remain in Tally any longer than he could help! So I imagine he would have contacted the Railway HQ in Melbourne, spelt out the situation and asked for a transfer away from Tallygaroopna to coinc'd with the end of the 1939 school year.

In handling his own devastation concerning the marriage, and family break-up, and my understanding more of the situation in later years, than I did at the time; one thing certain was that Dad would look for his own family's support as an interim measure for child-care.

His mother, brother Claude and younger sister Betty lived at Traralgon. (Betty had only recently married a Tallygaroopna chap, Lin Reid, who she had met during one of her Tally visits to stay with us. Claude was at this time working at the new Paper Mill at Morwell where he undertook to find Betty's husband a job. Dad also had a sister, Olive, living at Stratford with her railway ganger husband Frank. They had a railway house at Stratford which was much the same as the two railway houses that we had lived in before. I was later pleased that it was only a short walk to the Stratford school.

With all of this potential support, Gippsland seemed to be the answer for the call for child care. That is to say, for me anyway, as Dad had already enrolled Joan at St Anne's Girls school in Sale, as a boarder, commencing with the 1940 academic year.

Dad, in the meantime had been appointed to be Station Master at Toorong, a south eastern suburb of Melbourne whence he would take up duty at about Christmas time 1939. ([Back](#))



Our Mum, interestingly enough, had taken up employment with the Victoria Railways as a Dining Room attendant on the prestigious passenger train the Spirit of Progress (above) which ran express daily from Spencer Street Melbourne to Albury. Coincidentally, one of her brothers, Don, was a fireman on the Spirit and maybe had something to do with Mum's appointment.

So within the space of a few months, the happy family that both Joan and I had known for the duration of our lives to that point was about to split along several paths. Despite this, we had made up minds in our own way to show no particular favouritism to either Mum or Dad. As far as we were concerned, we had no reason to blame either of them for what happened. We loved them both equally as we did for the rest of their lives.

Joan off to Sale and young Teddy, initially anyway, to Stratford to live with Auntie Ollie, Uncle Frank and their small daughter.

It is at this point also, in this narrative, that other than when there may be occasions to mention Mum and Dad again from time to time, I will make no attempt to trace their subsequent lives. This is principally a story about me so continuing with family history will only detract from this objective. Suffice to say that they did divorce in the early 40's, both re-married had two children by their new union; Dad two boys, David (deceased) and Phillip. Mum had a boy and a girl, John and Pam (deceased).

SOME NOMADIC TIMES, 1939 to 1944 [\(Back\)](#)

Despite Dad's plan not to move from Tallygaroopna until the end of the 1939 school year, the Victorian Railway honchos must have had other ideas, because he had to move to Tooronga with three months of 1939 still to run.

The upshot of this being that Joan had to be accommodated somewhere for three to four months and my move to Stratford had to be brought forward to fit these changed date arrangements.

Joan went to Mirboo North, also a Gippsland locale, to stay with Dad's sister, Amy and husband Charles who was the Anglican rector at Mirboo. She subsequently moved to Sale, after Christmas, to start her stint of Boarding School.

My nomadic role, included the original move to Auntie Ollies at Stratford where I spent three months at the Stratford state school, but this only lasted until the end of the year because of the need to move to a High School for the 1940 academic year. As there was no High School at Stratford, Dad decided to move me down to Aunt Betty's at Traralgon where I was enrolled in the Traralgon Higher Elementary School, as it was called then, for commencement in January 1940.

The Traralgon living arrangements for me was something else again. Auntie Bet, who I think was only in her early 20's at the time, and like many young ladies from other than well-to-do families of the day, a house purchase was out of the question and rentals were not always within the budget. Her husband Lin, had just started his new job at the Morwell paper Mill and with nothing yet permanent about this arrangement rental payments had to be as minuscule as

possible into the foreseeable future and, because of the War, beyond. As it turned out, friends of Uncle Claude's had a property about ten miles south-west of Traralgon, on which was a vacant Settler's Cottage, (vacant and pretty destitute would be my description when I first saw it). Glass had disappeared from the windows, the chimney from the kitchen stove was a corrugated iron arrangement which, from the outside, resembled a suit of Ned Kelly's armour,

Uncle Claude who had been living with my grandmother in Traralgon and who was very handy with tools, (as too was Aunt Bet's husband, Lin), who between them soon had the place reasonably habitable. Plywood and hessian bags became temporary window treatments.

I seem to remember that Claude, who had decided to move in with us to be Johnny-on-the-spot for handyman (or even security) duties, and I shared a double bed. There was no electricity neither was there a telephone. The toilet arrangements were also fairly primitive, although this was not unusual out in the country in those days. (old telephone books for toilet paper.)

There were old dead gum trees, most still standing, all over the property. At night these seemed to take on skeletal and other odd ghostly shapes, depending on the strength of the moon light. This, added to the frightening sort of squeal through their naked branches on windy nights, prompted my keeping my head under the blankets.

As there were no school buses, I had to ride a fairly ancient old bike to school each day. Fortunately it was summer time, so the likelihood of cold and wet rides were not much of a problem. A constant problem though was the frequency of punctures at which I became quite an expert at repairing. On reflection, it could well have been due to the thinness of the tyres, I am sure they were not replaced at the time that they should have been.

Once I got used to the rather hard-living associated with this cottage and its location, I must say I started to warm to the rural, almost untouched, feel of the country-side. The country sounds of birds, fowls in distant properties, the roosters early morning crow, as well as cattle, sheep and horses also prompted constant feelings of the wonders of nature and in fact, are still a part of me, I am very much a country boy.

While this country-style living was consolidating for me, Dad had arrived at Toorong and had found himself a boarding house in a nearby location to the Railway Station, 25 Kai Koura Avenue, at which he decided I should join him at about the end of my first term of Higher Elementary schooling at Traralgon.

[\(Back\)](#)

I must say I left with rather mixed feelings. Never having enjoyed my series of first days at new schools, I was not really looking forward, so soon, to a repeat performance, particularly at a larger city school. Large it turned out to be, Spring Road Central School Malvern, which although only catering for first and second year High School of the day i.e. 7th and 8th year, did have a remarkably large student



population, seemingly made even larger by the early wartime influx of what we then referred to as reffo kids (a tag subsequently changed to new Australian).

The living conditions were another new experience for me, three in a seeming quick-in-succession space of time, during a six month period. I again shared a double bed, this time with Dad. We also shared the boarding house with an odd-ball wharf labourer. One of his odd customs being the unwrapping at every Friday night's evening meal of two mutton birds from their newspaper wrapping. These he would quickly and noisily, consume after the main course as prepared by the land-lady, a rather meek Mrs Smith. He would then roll up his sleeves rubbing the skins on his arms pledging a support for keeping-out-the-cold.

Any forebodings that I may have had concerning the starting at a new school, disappeared almost on the first day. It was a boy's school for a start. Of early Victorian/Edwardian style structure, very English to me by immediately making comparisons with English schools as typified in the British movies of the day.

The school grounds were bang smack in the middle of the Malvern City Gardens, bounded on the east side by the Park Street State school. The curriculum had with it a strong sporting programme, swimming being one (I had just learned to swim while at Traralgon) and the Malvern baths were only a hop-step-and-jump away. Similarly, cricket and football areas were just a short walk to the Tooronga playing fields. My interest in sport awakened.

Being thirteen by this time and hankering for some extra pocket money, Dad allowed me to take on a morning paper round at the adjoining Kooyong railway station as well as the selling of the Melbourne Herald at the same place each evening. The latter provided some thrills being on the Glenferrie Road tram line. I soon discovered that there was many a sale to be had among the tram passengers, so I'd jump on a Glenferrie bound tram and by the time it got to Scotch College, about two stops away, I would have sold most of my Heralds. I'd return to my paper selling spot by the next tram back. Saturday evening was of particular interest to me because of the fertile sales spot at the Kooyong Tennis Club. One of the stars of the day, Adrian Quist, (right) was a regular client of mine. He would always give me two bob (two shillings) and tell me to keep the change. Quite a tip considering the paper then only cost two-pence.



We were living at Tooronga at the time of the 1940 floods and I can still remember the Kooyong Tennis Courts, particular the famous centre court, all looking like huge swimming pools, the nearby flooding Yarra River being the culprit. I can also remember that it took a week or two before these flood-waters subsided. ([Back](#))

While seeming probably fairly inconsequential now, one of the highlights of the week for me at that time, was the weekly issue of an English boys comic book called The Magnet which Dad bought for me. It was probably better described as a thin serial-based paper-back which concerned a (fictional) boys grammar school in England called Greyfriars of whom the central character was a little fat student by the name of Billy Bunter. My life at that time was somewhat lonely, Dad always being at the station when I came home from school, no possibility of a boy-to-boy interchange in the boarding

house neighbourhood, but at least one day a week I could bury my head in the Magnet and become a vicarious student at Greyfriars.

Oddly enough, Dad, at about the same time, introduced me to P G Wodehouse books and the exploits of Bertie Wooster, again a vicarious source of English antics.

At the end of 1941, another railway-move was in the offing. Dad had obviously noted the home-life disadvantages for a young teen-age boy living in a boarding house. However, there wasn't a quick fix but it could be addressed coincident with the next Railway transfer for him. Additionally, Joan was due to finish her secondary school at St Anne's also at the end of 1941.

Being a lover of Gippsland, where Dad's roots belonged, he applied for a Night Officer position at the Warragul railway station which would be effective in December 1941. A timing that was perfect in respect of Joan's finish at St Anne's and one that would still provide opportunities for a more realistic home-life for me with Dad's opting to rent a house at Warragul. The one disadvantage being, that as he would be working every night he would be sleeping most of the day. This would not have much effect on Joan as she would have a local Warragul job by that time and of course I'd be at school all day. In any event, on most days Dad would be up and about by mid- afternoon.

So just before Christmas 1941, Dad had found a nice house for rent in Gladstone Street Warragul where he soon set-up shop and a more stable environment for the three of us where and I hasten to say, a more stable and happy life style began.

During those past three years, we saw very little of Mum, except for an occasional visit to Melbourne when she would take Joan and I out somewhere for the day. They were most enjoyable occasions with the exchange of goodies of various kinds and organising things for us that we would not otherwise be doing.

*Ted the Telegram Boy
Warragul 1942 [\(Back\)](#)*

Although not realising it at the time, my school days were almost over. Brought about I guess by my obtaining a part-time job at the Post Office as a Telegram Boy after school and at weekends. My subsequent passing of the PMG entrance examination led to me being given permanent employment in early 1943 at the Warragul P.O at 77 pounds (\$154) per annum. I learned that if I became proficient in Morse Code I would be entitled to an extra 5 pounds per year for which I later qualified. (Joan, by this time, was a telephonist at the Warragul Post Office so it became quite a family affair.).



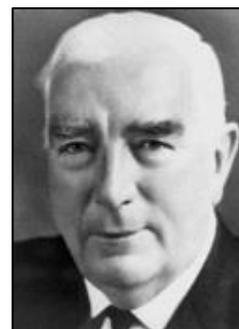
One of the things I remember most about being a Telegraph Messenger, was the occasional need to deliver a 'Next-of-Kin message as they were then known. These were telegrams from Canberra advising Wounded in Action, Missing-in-action or the worst one Killed-in-Action. More often than not the Post Master would arrange for a Clergyman or Policeman to personally deliver these messages. However, there were occasions when this was not possible and was left to a 15 year old telegram boy,

It was remarkable how quickly I grew-up after delivering a few of this type of telegram. The

other sad part about this was the fact that Warragul, being a fairly small town at that time, we all knew one another so well, resulting in our grieving together.

A most memorable part of my short time in Warragul was my participation in the Warragul Citizens Band, a band that would normally have folded in the early stages of WWII due to the sudden exodus of bandsmen who enlisted in the forces. Fortunately, the bandmaster, Mr Bruce Bunn, was beyond the age for enlistment and he rallied around a number of sons of bandsmen and other young men to make up the numbers. I was one of the latter and upon selection was given a euphonium to learn and play which oddly enough later led to my becoming a member of the Liberal party when I became of age to vote.

The circumstances of the latter were, as a member of the Warragul Citizens Band in 1941, we were invited to perform at a Spitfire Appeal cheque presentation ceremony in the township of Drouin. The then Prime Minister, Mr Robert Menzies, was on hand to accept the cheque, (5000 Pounds, a Spitfire's cost at the time.). On accepting the cheque he also remarked on the Bands magnificent rendering of Abl'd With Me and followed this up by presenting each of us, (24 in total), with a crisp brand new one pound note. My Liberal Party allegiance began that very day. [\(Back\)](#)



As an aside, I should mention that much later, at RAAF station Laverton in 1954, where as a young Flying Officer, I was an officer of the guard in a Guard of Honour mounted for Mr Menzies during an official P.M's RAAF visit. The occasion was not of course appropriate for mention of Spitfire Appeals or brand new notes.

However, nearly ten years later when returning from a Malaysia to Point Cook posting, on board the P&O liner RMS Oronsay, on which Sir Robert and Dame Pattie were also passengers, there was an appropriate occasion which provided such an opportunity.

This opportunity occurred when my wife and our two small children were entering the lift to go down to the first class dining-room. Our small daughter, 5 year old, Robyn, ran into the empty lift as soon as the doors opened and before we had time to follow her, they closed again the lift continuing down its two-more-deck journey. I panicked a bit, raced down the adjoining stairs to the next deck; and just in time to see Sir Robert and Dame Pattie enter the lift to be confronted with our by now, alone and tearful little daughter who Sir Robert had taken in his arms to comfort. In offering our thanks and during some follow-on chat I did mention the Drouin occasion and the Spitfire Appeal cheque and my subsequent allegiance. Sir Robert not only remembered the gift of the one pound notes but also the excellence of our bandsman-ship at the time. He also quite graciously thanked me for my Liberal leanings and wished us well in our next posting to Point Cook.

SOME YOUNG ADULT AND MORE RAAF EXPERIENCES 1943-1947 [\(Back\)](#)

So it is now at this stage of my story that the nomadic experiences of my child-hood cease and, although many place shifts will still unfold they will, in the main, be forming part of my blossoming adult professional life.

Included also in this section of my book are accounts of two further RAAF exposures and which will eventually lead on to my joining the permanent Air Force in 1947.

There is little doubt that 1943 was a momentous year for me. The Post Master at Warragul, a fine old fatherly gentleman was Mr O'Mullane, called me over to his table one morning and asked me how I would like to go and work with the Air Force at West Sale in the RAAF Post Office? He might as well have said how would you like a piece of the moon?. My reaction at the time firstly, not being able to believe what I was hearing, then became one of sheer joy. Memories of Laverton flooded back with the opportunities once again of being, on a daily basis in close encounter with aeroplanes. Maybe there would even be a chance for the occasional flight? I might be able to talk to real pilots etc, etc.

I immediately replied to Mr O'Mullane with words to the effect that, I would love to, but I'll have to ask my Dad first. He said, you ask your Dad to come and see me and I will explain all of this to him. I wanted to rush home straight away but had to wait patiently until after I finished work for the day, (also I don't think Dad would have been pleased to have been awakened in the middle of the day after night shift).

I expected that any doubts that Dad might have about the proposed move, would be my lack of social maturity, (I was only 16 years old) in comparison with the eighteen years, plus many more in most cases, of the RAAF types that I would be mixing with at West Sale?

While Dad is making up his mind, I should at first talk a little about RAAF West Sale. It being established, like so many dozens of Air Force airfields throughout Victoria, (2 others in the local area East Sale and Bairnsdale) and indeed Australia, during the early days of 1940-42. Unlike pre-war RAAF establishments being referred to as Stations, the wartime ones were referred to as camps. No doubt as a throw-back to the military establishment between-war-days when so many were no more than tent cities and became known as army camps or, in the case of the RAAF, airforce camp.

West Sale, about 7 miles from Sale, (see map on next page), was established in 1941 for the express purpose of teaching bombing and gunnery to air-crew members and was formed as No 3 Bombing and Gunnery School (3 B.A.G.S) where training commenced in December 1942. It was part of an original large grazing property where there had been a make-shift landing-field of sorts used by itinerant civil aircraft from time to time. The homestead on the property was a rather grand mansion Raeshaw which served as the Officers Mess.

So now back to the much awaited parental decision as to whether young Teddy was going to be allowed to cut loose among the blue orchids of the West Sale RAAF camp.

In the event there was no real problem, Dad had just married again; my sister was about to get married and move to Melbourne, so I daresay there was some attraction about Dad not having to burden his new wife with 2 other and virtual, adults under the same roof.

West Sale Aerodrome.



The Aerodrome is located 7 klm from Sale ([Back](#))



An Aerial View of the Aerodrome

Among the favourable factors pervading Dad's decision in the affirmative were the following:-

- There were three other PMG men involved.
- A Post Master, Vin Wills (about 45 years old) a Postal Clerk, Jack Keighery (the same age) a Postal Assistant, Graeme Smith and yours truly, both of us 16 years of age.
- We would be living together at the back of the Post Office.
- We would also have the privileges of the Sgts Mess and,
- I would only be 50 miles from home.

As all of this seemed to be a fairly civilised arrangement Dad readily gave Mr OMullane the green light and I was ready to pack my bags. Although there was about a 21 day break before the actual start date; I must say I was all for Dad hopping in the car and taking me down to West Sale for a bit of a recce. This was not occasioned, if for no other reason than his petrol ration tickets being limited to four gallons per month. (we had, incidentally, disposed of the Swift prior to leaving Tallygaroopna. Dad's brother Claude, who was soon to enlist in the A.I.F (as a Stretcher-bearer), owned a beautiful 1936 Oldsmobile which he left for Dad to use for the duration of the war).



[\(Back\)](#)

There were clothes to buy for work, as I would not be able to wear my quite numerous Telegraph Messenger uniforms, (complete with double seats in each pair of trousers, which although ensuring even wear and tear were not particularly comfortable). It was summer time, when I knew the Air Force people wore khaki at that time. I persuaded Dad to purchase khaki shirts and trousers for me so that I would look part of the place. This really was a better move than I expected, as we virtually lived in the Sergeants Mess except for sleeping and I didn't stand out like the sore toes of the other three.

The day of the big move dawned. I was so excited that I had not slept a wink. I was surprised too, how Dad was really cutting me loose. I was sure he would drive me down to West Sale, checking the place out as he went and issuing a list of do's and don'ts with almost each breath. He had been a stern disciplinarian but neither my sister nor me were in any doubt about us being the better for it. And, on reflection now as I write this, it could well be said it was a compliment to me that Dad gave me the freedom to attempt coping on my own.

So it was into the midday train to Bairnsdale that I was bundled for my getting-off-point which was the Fulham siding, (just a platform, no station and even the platform has long since disappeared, RAAF West Sale having been disbanded at the end of 1945), about two hours travelling time away because the old steam train stopped at every station.

The southern boundary of the airfield, absolutely adjacent to the railway line, was lined with large pine trees. As the train slowed down approaching the Fulham siding, the outline of some beautiful looking aeroplanes started to appear. They were parked under the pine trees which I later learned, was a camouflage tactic as well as a sensible dispersal as an air raid precaution. I was also soon to learn that the pilots of these beautiful planes did not consider them so beautiful. To them they were just ugly, heavy and old Fairey Battles, long since dispensed with by the Royal Air Force and relegated to their role in Australia of towing targets for erstwhile air-gunners at which to shoot,



*On station for Drogue Towing
(RAAF Fairey Battle aircraft)*



*Returning from a cross-country. [\(Back\)](#)
(RAAF Avro Anson aircraft)*

To add to the chagrin of most of the pilots, who had joined the RAAF to fly fighter aircraft in a shooting war; and not towing bloody drogues at 5,000 feet, up and down a 90 mile beach in Gippsland in a slow lumbering obsolete old Battle. (by the same token, I had not long been at West Sale when I, (pleasurably) noted, from time to time, some pretty fancy flying over the airfield by those (aerobatic) old Fairey Battles).

In addition to the quite large number of Fairey Battles, the aircraft inventory at West Sale also comprised quite a number of Avro Anson's (used for gunnery and bombing training) as well as the twin-engined Air Speed Oxfords (used similarly as for Ansons).

Readers will be coming used to my statement every now and again through this narrative when I digress for an aside comment. Well, I am at that point again here. This aside being in relation to one of the co-designers of the Oxford, about which I did not know until quite recently. I was indeed surprised to learn that Neville Shute, the quite famous author, commenced his professional career as an aircraft designer and did in fact have a lot to do with the design of the Airspeed Oxford.

Lesser in number of aircraft at West Sale, was the odd Vultee Vengeance, the occasional Lockheed Hudson a Moth Minor and several of what I used to call the sports jobs, they being Ryan ST's (right). The latter aircraft were purchased originally from the US by the Dutch Air Force. Quite a number of them found their way into the RAAF's inventory after the Japanese over-ran Batavia. They were the prettiest little aeroplane that I had ever seen. Apparently little devils to fly, particularly on take-off when they reputedly had a rather violent swing.



It is interesting to note that one of the first fatal crashes that occurred during my time at West Sale involved a Ryan ST doing an air test after an E servicing. The pilot doing the test was a Flt Sgt Cliff Gumley and his passenger, a corporal Engine Fitter who had been in charge of the major service. It would seem that while over Maffra at 5,000 feet and recovering from some aerobatics, one side of the mainplane parted company from the aeroplane. Despite Cliff Gumley's exhortation to his passenger to bail out he failed to comply. Cliff parachuted safely into a Maffra field, but sadly his passenger went-in with the remains of the Ryan. I can still quite vividly feel the air of gloom that pervaded the whole of RAAF West Sale following this aircraft accident.

There was also a Ryan ST at RAAF East Sale which was virtually the private aeroplane of the then OC, Gp Capt Bull Garing, who used to fly before lunch on some days and on landing would taxi up to the Officers Mess and park the Ryan in the OC's car parking space and proceed to lunch!

I should, at this stage, give some account of our duties at the RAAF Post Office which, in effect, provided the services of any other Post Office of the day i.e. mail, stamp sales, telephone and telegraph services. Our Post office was closed on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

Whilst the main telephone switchboard for the camp was housed and manned by WAAAF

telephonists, our P.O had a small switchboard, which was manned every day with particular busy times being each evenings when trunk line calls from lonely airmen, to wives, girl-friends, families etc. were at a premium. Both Graeme Smith and I were responsible for this manning of the switchboard and the administering of the trunk-line call paper work.

Our living quarters were in a single room at the rear of the Post Office, with four beds, a few chairs and the odd table also a wash-basin. Fortunately there was an ablution block right outside our back door where we were able to shower and attend to toilet needs.

As mentioned earlier we took all our meals in the Sergeant's Mess and young Graeme Smith and I felt quite privileged to be members of this Mess, particularly from the viewpoint of our relatively tender age. Being 16 (not that this would stop any one of that age these days) we had not been introduced to alcohol, neither were we tempted to break any rules by sneaking the odd beer from the Sergeant's Mess bar. We did manage though to quickly learn how to play billiards and snooker and also to make good use of the table tennis and darts equipment. The Ante Room as it was called then, and is still so-called today in both Sergeants and Officers Messes, was virtually a Lounge room with Bar adjoining.

As a measure of the saying of youth at the helm and during those hectic days of the early '40's when WWII was at its peak, the Commanding Officer at West Sale when I was there was Group Captain R.F.M (Bob) Dalton who, I seem to recall, was only 25 (not to be confused with a later Group Captain Bob Dalkin). His counterpart at East Sale, Group Captain W.E. (Bull) Garing, mentioned on the previous page, was about the same age.

Of the air crew specialist training programmes at West Sale, bombing and gunnery, the latter began to gain more emphasis as the weeks went by. Far more Gunners than Bomb Aimers were required so all three of the major types of aircraft on the airfield were involved mainly in gunnery. Both the Anson and the Oxford were gun turret equipped. From memory I think they used to carry 5 trainees on each mission, in either aircraft. As mentioned earlier, the Battles were equipped as a drogue towing aircraft with a pilot and a drogue operator.

The technique involved was that the Battles would position themselves on station over the 90 mile beach and with the gunnery and bombing range too, which was adjacent to Seaspray beach but in a proscribed area of the beach and sand-dunes. The drogue would be let out quite some distance from the aircraft by a winch, then trainee airgunners, in Ansons or Oxfords, would attempt to engage the drogue target. Rounds of ammunition were paint coated and colour coded to a particular trainee. Hits were registered by the coloured paint.

At a given time, the attacking aircraft would break off and return to West Sale airfield. The drogue aircraft would make a reasonably low pass over the range and the drogue operator would release the drogue when, once on the ground, the appropriate hits-to-trainee would be recorded for tallying back at West Sale at the end of the days operations. The lumbering old Fairey Battle would then climb away to again get on station with a new drogue being strung out for a repeat procedure of literally being shot at by another group of novices.

The length of each sortee was about 3 hours. No wonder the pilots were bored to tears with the whole affair.

I should now record here, my understanding of one of the most horrific, and one in a million

incidents, that happened with an aborted drogue drop. My understanding of the incident, which happened nearly 60 years ago, as parlayed around at the time (and on which I was not privvy to any official report) goes as , follows:-

...the first sortee of the morning had been completed and just as the particular Battle was heading down the Range, having almost lost the height required for the drogue drop, the drogue winch jammed and with it the release mechanism too! Coincident with this occurrence an unscheduled sea-mist came floating in over the beach cutting ground viz to zero. The captain of the aircraft commenced abort procedure by climbing away to a safe zone where the drogue winch unserviceability could be checked out. His intention being, if this could not be achieved, a return to West Sale and an attempted landing with the drogue still attached. Unfortunately, due to the low level before the abort, the drogue wire caught some obstruction, almost on the boundary of the Seaspray public beach. The wire snapped and snaked through the air at no doubt about the same speed as the aircraft and a young teen age girl who was on the beach had her leg severed by the drogue wire. Added to the sadness of the accident, the pilot, a Flt Sgt was unaware of what had happened other than that he had lost the drogue. I actually met him some thirty years later at a Rotary luncheon. He was by this time, a senior executive in a world-wl'd radio conglomerate but still recalled the incident with a great deal of anguish.

On a more positive side a series of fund-raising ventures were held by the RAAF personnel and a suitable artificial limb was made and put to good use by the young lady concerned. It was also a much applauded public relations exercise for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Incidents, accidents and fatal crashes were a fairly common occurrence down in that corner of Gippsland in the early days of WWII. Flying training was intense, flying hours were more than constant, so I guess experience levels contributed. The sum of the accidents between RAAF Bairnsdale, RAAF East Sale and RAAF West Sale during those hectic '40's numbered in the vicinity of 200. Many directly related to the many fatal flying accidents involving the Beaufort bomber, firstly at Bairnsdale (GRS) and latterly at the RAAF's No 1 OTU at East Sale. My recollection, although not from any personal experience level viewpoint suggests, as far as flying personnel at West Sale were concerned, that the majority of pilots still being only sergeants, there had not been enough time for the gaining of enough flying hours which normally would minimise pilot error flying accidents. In the case of East Sale, and the Beaufort fatal crashes, that was another story. Suffice to say at this stage in this narrative that during Gp Capt Garing's time in command at No 1 OTU, in an attempt to establish the cause of so many fatal Beaufort accidents. He, I understand, committed a Beaufort to destruction in a maintenance hangar by simulating constant stress conditions. This testing was coincident at about the same time that WgCdr Brian (Blackjack) Walker, then CO of 5 OTU over-rode a runaway trim tab on a Beaufort flight from Tocumwal to Bankstown.

So now, back to my West Sale story where daily contact with pilots in the Sgt's Mess enabled me to arrange my first flight in an aeroplane, to which first my Dad had to give his OK. The flight duly okayed by my non-aviation minded parent, was in an Avro Anson flown by two young sergeant pilots whom, I'm sure, looking back now, would not have been any older than 19, or even had they started to shave at that stage?. This was pretty much the measure of things at West Sale, and no doubt throughout the RAAF at the time, as most of the pilots were NCO's and under the age of 20! There were very few officer pilots at Sale except for the executive staff.

The flight was ostensibly, a dual cross country check of one of the pilots. The cross country turned out to be across the Baw Baw ranges and return down through a myriad of attractive Gippsland valleys. Although it was my first flight and I was not up the front, I judged our flight level to be less than 500 feet! At one stage, following the contours we steep-turned into another valley where lo and behold was a farmer with a team of 6 Clydsdales horses plowing a field. I then noted the track of zigzag-plowing and an angry fist-shaking farmer resulting from the rude interruption by the Aggie!.

I loved every minute of my first flying experience as I did with other flights that I made at West Sale in Oxfords as well as in Aggies as the Anson was known by all.

[\(Back\)](#)

Another aspect that I fancied about flying was the Link Trainer (right). For readers not aware of the Link it was, although very basic, the flight simulator of the day. In getting to know the Link Trainer Sergeant instructor I also got to know more about the Link.



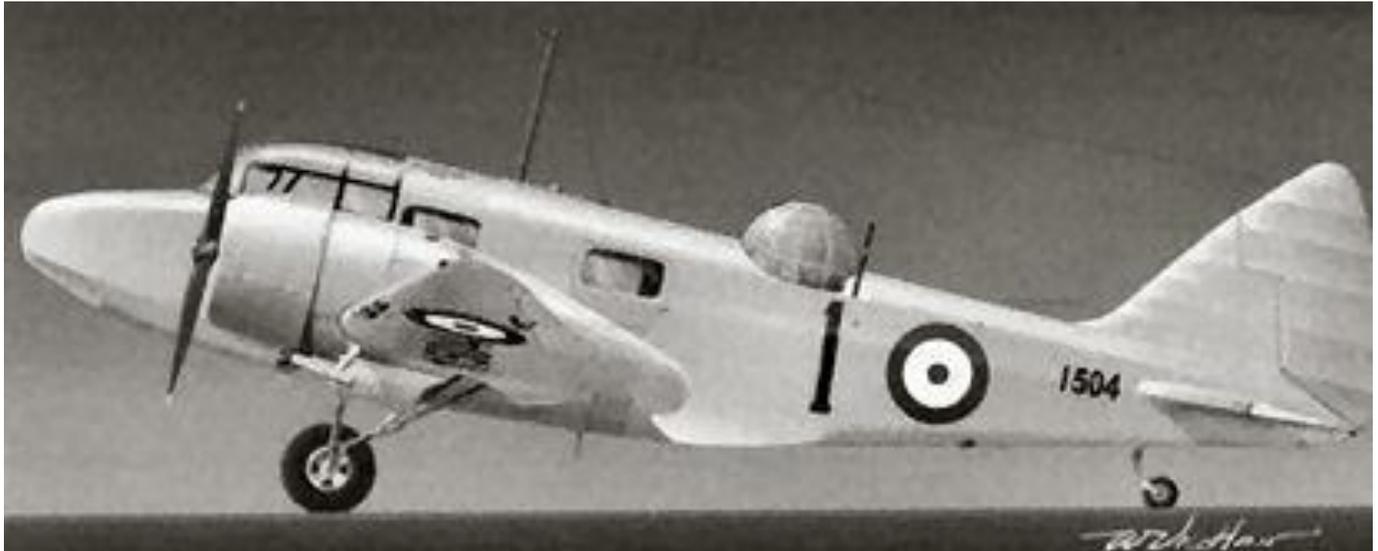
Pilots who did Link training, were actually practicing their instrument flying techniques.

They would climb into the cockpit, the wooden canopy lid would be lowered and the whole flight would be undertaken without any external visual reference from the cockpit. I can't recall how many hours I had in this Link trainer, it was usually after dinner at night when the Sergeant Instructor was either doing routine maintenance or preparing the next day's programme. One thing I do remember, although of basic nature, flight attitudes and movements within this simulator were quite realistic.

Some three years later, which we will go into later in this narrative, my Link training experience came very much to the fore when undergoing flying training up in Cairns. I was able to go solo after only six hours forty minutes of dual instruction. This was just as well too given that flight instruction was five pounds per hour at that time and my weekly wage was only. three pounds.

When I departed from RAAF West Sale, the number of RAAF/WAAAF personnel in the Sale district at any one time, had grown to about a round-figure of 4000. Bairnsdale had closed down, the personnel moving to No. 1 OTU at East Sale. Further more, to aggravate the Sale district Air Force population situation, No 4 RAAF hospital, located in the Sale township had been upgraded to a major surgical and convalescent centre.

These potential numbers forced some restrictions on local weekend leave arrangements. NO 1 OTU would be allowed to go into Sale each second Saturday afternoon and West Sale personnel on Sunday of the same week. Then the reverse would apply for the following weekend.



Ready for the Day's Gunnery (An Airspeed Oxford) ([Back](#))

Weekend leave to Melbourne from either place was undertaken in what we referred to, in those days, as road-trains. Virtually a large semi-trailer with a canvas/tarpaulin type canopy with limited seating.

I can honestly say that, even now after the passage of sixty years, the time I spent at West Sale was quite Utopian to me. There was never a dull moment. Also I believe I can truthfully say on reflection, that we four postal employees were good ambassadors for the Postmaster General's department. We were most attentive to the postal/telegraph/telephone welfare of each member of the RAAF and WAAAF at West Sale and we considered ourselves proud of our War effort.

I even managed, during my time there, to undertake a couple of relieving stints at the RAAF East Sale post office. This gave me an opportunity to see at close hand the workings of a busy and most important Operational Training Unit which was under daily output pressure.

It seemed something of a paradox when, almost thirty years later, I was posted to RAAF Base East Sale to be the Wing Commander Admin Staff Officer. History too, did repeat itself in that the two years that I spent in the Sale district on this occasion were just as happy.

The next chapter of my nomad-ing is about to begin with a few months in Melbourne undergoing a telegraphist in training course at the Postal Training School in Flinders Lane.

However and before leaving the Sale area in this part of the narrative, it seems appropriate to recount hereunder, in more detail, the Gp Capt Garing (right) pursuit of the Beaufort-fatality problem coupled with Wg Cdr Blackjack Walker's near fatal Beaufort experience during a ferrying flight from Tocumwal to Bankstown. A story which I quote verbatim hereunder and I am sure you will agree is most enthralling to say the least. ([Back](#))



My interest in this matter, although beginning when I was at West Sale in the early '40's, really

took off during a RAAF Staff College reunion in Canberra in 1991, an annual occasion when I usually had a tete-a-tete with, by then Air Cdre (Ret'd), Bull Garing, also a regular attender at these reunions and with whom I usually shared a convivial glass while we reminisced.

On this particular occasion, when the Beaufort accidents came up, Air Cdre Garing not only recounted to our group his own experiences with the problem but also that of Blackjack Walker's (CO of NO 5 OTU at Bankstown NSW at the time, 1943). He followed this up, a week or two later, by sending me a copy of Wg Cdr Walker's Incident Report, (dated 9th November 1943) detailing his experience with Beaufort elevator trim tabs.

It is an incredible story which I reproduce in the following pages and in the format in which it was mailed to me by Air Cdre Garing on his return from the reunion. *(I took the liberty when reproducing it at that time to format a cover page for the story. The notes that are added to Brian Walker's report were made by me from my discussions with Air Cdre Garing).* I also hasten to add that, although the story has no doubt already had wld distribution, its inclusion here, should none-the-less stimulate interest, or even memories, for reader.



Breaking Cloud (A Beaufort Bomber) [\(Back\)](#)

BEAUFORT AIRCRAFT, AN UNWANTED ADVENTURE (5th November 1943)

A report written by:-

Group Captain (Ret'd) Brian Walker DSO RAAF

(At the time of the Incident described here-in the writer of this Report was Commanding Officer of No 5 OTU R.A.A.F. Station Bankstown NSW Australia)

While flying Beaufort A9-415 from Tocumwal to Bankstown on 5th November 1943 I sensed an irregular vibration in the control column when nearing the vicinity of Crookwell.

We were at about 8,000 feet above a light layer of scattered cumulus but seeing nothing to cause turbulence.

I called to one of the crew to check the tail plane as I suspected something may be working loose in the elevator control.

Brian Black Jack Walker DSO ([Back](#))

Almost before he could move, the control column began to rock back and forth quite violently, so I immediately reduced power and hauled back on the column with every ounce of strength I could muster.



The control column made a couple of more violent forward moves but then appeared to lock with a very heavy down force which was stable but I doubt whether I could have held it for any more than five minutes on my own as my bottom was off the seat through the strength exerted.

When the panic had subsided I realised the aircraft was fitted with dual controls so I called to Sgt Jaggs, a Wireless Air Observer who had applied for a flying course and informed him that his Course was due to start forthwith and got him into the empty co-Pilot's seat. I then ordered all aboard to don parachutes.

With the help of Sgt Jaggs the situation was more manageable but it was still my intention to get the aircraft clear of the mountains, bail out the crew then roll the aircraft over and hope the heavy subsequent nose-up force would throw me out.

My Chief Ground Instructor, Flight Lieutenant Denis Cowper, who was on board then informed me that we had eleven passengers, including one, Pilot Officer Potter, who had jumped aboard just prior to moving off the tarmac and he did not have a parachute.

I remember the brief conversation with this young Gentleman:- when did you come aboard Potter? well sir, said Potter, I asked Flight Lieutenant Cowper and he said it would be alright, just before you moved off sir Well Potter I said, you are going to look silly when we wave you good-bye.

Potter was standing in a well just behind my right shoulder, a fair youth of no more than nineteen years but, I noticed a tear came from each eye after my last remark. At the same time my Chief Ground Instructor Cowper gave me a hard look and said: I think you can handle it sir.

By now, it would be some ten minutes after the initial trouble, I had the speed back between 90 to 100 knots, power well reduced and the aircraft was descending about 100 to 200 feet per minute towards Bankstown. As the situation appeared stable as long as we kept that back pressure on the elevator it seemed reasonable to attempt a crash landing at Bankstown.

Of course there would be no gear or flaps as the pair of us could just hold the aircraft in the

attitude described and it was reasoned that both gear and flaps could make the aircraft unstable again with subsequent even more nose-down trim. I did, just gently, feel the elevator trim wheel and it appeared locked, so I decided to leave it well as it was. Fear gives strength so I reasoned JAGGS and I could hold it long enough.

I remember saying to LACW Patterson, a loquacious orderly room W.A.A.A.F sitting behind within earshot Patterson, I have never seen you so quiet, and all I got was a sickly grin. She must have been extremely frightened. So was I, but far too busy to worry about it. Then I said to Potter : we will have a go at a forced landing on Bankstown but if she lets go I'll curse you all the way down.

Well I do remember that approach on Bankstown. First I had to do up my own harness and had to yell and scream at Jaggs; more back pressure, as he tended to let the nose drop a trifle if I relaxed even for a moment as was necessary to arrange and tighten my own safety harness. And now to that final approach..

I pointed the aircraft well to the North of where I knew the Bankstown aerodrome to lie and keeping the speed below about 100 knots, turned on final over Prospect reservoir just under 1000 feet and, with much more yelling at poor Jaggs, while taking even one hand off the column to adjust power, the pair of us managed to arrive at a couple of feet over the fence heading SE with fortunately no conflicting traffic.

To make sure I was as close to terrain as possible I waited till I could just feel the propellers starting to make contact then yelled for the last time: Let her go and the aircraft slid to rest on her belly. Both props came off but luckily did not penetrate the fuselage.

We all got out safely and I went immediately to the rear and as was suspected, found one elevator Trim Tab hanging loose, completely detached.

From the start of the problem to the aircraft coming to rest would have been about 50 minutes, as far as I was concerned 50 minutes of concentrated fright, I then noticed that Potter got out with a parachute harness on but Dennis Cowper was not wearing a harness. That man had some guts but he was a rugby Wallaby and some of them don't come any finer. He later said simply when queried:- I knew that you could handle it sir.

I can assure you that not until that aircraft came to rest, did the butterflies stop fluttering in my tummy.

I rang my Chief Flying Instructor, Squadron Leader Ross Little and told him of the accident. He offered to send another Beaufort to which I replied: no way Ross, send a Beaufighter as they have an irreversible screw-jack in the elevator trim, a much better and safer design.

When I returned to my Unit the next day I was met by Corporal Blake who had signed the Beaufort out on the previous day and was a worried man.

He had a complete Beaufort elevator trim system laid out on a bench and invited me to inspect it for security which I did and certainly looked OK. He then went to the fork-end which would attach to the tab and spun it between his palms and the cable came adrift at the Brieese control. From memory it appeared this unit could look secure but in the very odd case, it could come

undone with disastrous results. It was later modified but immediately made subject to special daily inspection.

So what do you think caused more than quite a number of Beauforts to dive unexpectedly into the ground?

I won't go into the politics surrounding this problem, but suffice it to state that Wing Commander Charles Learmonth, who was a friend, went into the water off the Western Australian coast some time after my episode. He was, at the time, leading a formation of three aircraft and the pilot of one of the formation, No 2 aircraft observed an elevator trim tab become loose and flap up and down causing the aircraft to dive, eventually into the sea with Charles exclaiming to the effect that something had gone amiss and he could not hold it. Of course, his aircraft was not fitted with dual controls. How lucky, or unlucky, can you be?

Signed:-
Brian R Walker DSO
Group Captain (Ret'd) RAAF

P.S. For the Record I believe that I am not only the first, but the only, pilot to have brought a Beaufort with this problem back and survived with all my crew.

Note 1:- *At the same time as Group Captain Brian WALKER fortuitously escaped disaster, a Beaufort with over 1000 hours flying time was tested to destruction by the Maintenance Squadron at No 1 OTU RAAF East Sale, under orders of Group Captain GARING DFC the Commanding Officer of 1 OTU. It was the Brieese elevator trim which gave way. All Beaufort flying at East Sale was immediately ceased.*

Note 2:- *RAAF Headquarters similarly ordered all Beaufort squadrons to ground their aircraft until modifications were designed and manufactured by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation. It is understood that Wing Commander LEARMONTH, who was carrying out bombing exercises off North-West Cape in Western Australia did not receive the message in time.*

Note 3:- *In my discussions with the then Air Cdre (Ret'd) Garing he confirmed that to his certain knowledge Group Captain Brian Walker was the only Beaufort pilot to land his aircraft after the failure in flight of the elevator trim tab control. Also, that after modified elevator trim controls were fitted to Beaufort aircraft, they then operated without further difficulty.*

Group Captain Brian Black Jack Walker DSO joined the RAAF in 1935. The outbreak of World War II found him with No 25 Squadron flying Wirraways. After a period of instructing he went to No 12 Squadron before joining No 30 Squadron as Commanding Officer. This was the first RAAF Beaufighter Squadron. He then went north to New Guinea where his exploits on Beaufighters are legendary. In 1944 he was seconded to De Havilland as test pilot on

Mosquitoes. At the end of that year, until the conclusion of the war, he commanded No 1 Fighter Wing in Darwin flying Spitfires and Mustangs.

Regrettably, I am again at a point in my narrative where I need to include another one of my asides. I say regrettably, because this particular aside involves the Bull Garing about which we have just been reading in the last couple of pages and of whose death I have just learned (17th January 2004). He was just 6 months short of 90 years of age. So I thought it not inappropriate to include something of his RAAF career in my RAAF story.

*Shipping Strike, Vilaz Straits, 1943
(Blackjack's Beaufighter)*



I'm not sure where he picked-up the nickname Bull, I do not think it would be with any reference to as being like a bull at a gate. Neither do I think it relative to the popular description of anything bull-defecation-ish. However, he was known throughout the RAAF as Bull. He had a particular image of everything having to be done just right. This was typified by not only the immaculate nature of his dress and a penchant for everything being spick and span but also by his love (and knowledge) of the good things in life, good food, good wine, good manners. Many would say his officer-like qualities typified the military correctness associated with the expression an officer and a gentleman. Others would also comment on a certain eccentricity as being part of his make-up.

Being a pre-war pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force, entering in 1929 through the Royal Military College Duntroon/RAAF cadetship scheme, he was soon in action when WWI1 broke out, having found himself in the UK in 1939 as part of the ferry-to-Australia pick-up of the RAAF's new Sunderland flying boats. Instead the UK was where he and the Sunderlands remained, very much in action, (being awarded the DFC), until his transfer to the South West Pacific theatre where in 1942 he was appointed Air Commander of No 9 Operations Group RAAF NG with particular involvement in the Milne Bay campaign. His Distinguished Service Cross (US) was recognition of his part in what General Douglas MacArthur described as the decisive aerial engagement of the war in the South West Pacific.

Post-war he continued to represent the RAAF with accustomed dignity and flair in a variety of senior posts. These included Air Officer Commanding the RAAF's overseas headquarters in London, commandant of the RAAF Staff College and officer commanding the larger RAAF bases of Pearce, Point Cook, Richmond and Edinburgh, the last two providing two aspects of his personality for which he had become famous.

Firstly whilst at Richmond a confrontation which he had with a close RAAF colleague of mine, then (1953?), Flt Lt Geoff Meirisch, a Beaufighter pilot of WWII, who had just re-enlisted and was at Richmond undergoing refresher flying.

Geoff had experienced a rather rough day, when the refresher bit was not going so well, (in the event, it did not work out. He became a Radio Officer instead which he was when I met him at

Air and Ground Radio School in early 1954). Anyway and because of his rough day, one of his refresher-flying course mates, the owner of a fast and noisy motorcycle, encouraged Geoff to accompany him, on the motor-bike for a few jars in a local hostelry at nearby Windsor. It was a cold night so they were both rugged up in their RAAF greatcoats.

About to depart through the main gate exit of RAAF Station Richmond, en route to their planned drink-supping-tryst in Windsor, a large dark blue shiny RAAF staff car was approaching the entrance gate. Geoff's mate recognised the car as that of the Officer Commanding, (OC). All at Richmond, including Geoff's mate, knew of the OC's penchant for the correctness of dress which included a verboten policy for mixing uniform and civilian dress. The immediate concern was for the outer garb of both he and Geoff i.e a RAAF officer's great-coat plus cream slacks, (which they were both wearing) and booted with suede shoes, would definitely not go over so well with the sharp-eyed OC. With this, he quickly let out the clutch of his motor-cycle and at the same time rapidly increasing the hand throttle.

From a stationery position to almost take-off speed, Geoff, whose grip on his mate's waist had not been that strong, quickly and surprisingly found himself flat on his back on the road, his officer's peaked cap still on his head in-a-rearward-position. He was laying near the rear door of the OC's staff car. Meanwhile his mate, accompanied by a rapidly but diminishing muffled roar, was disappearing just as rapidly into the night. As the story then goes, the driver had stopped the staff car whereupon Bull, sitting in the rear seat, wound down the window and enquired of Geoff:- that man down there, what are you doing and what is your name?

Geoff having not yet been long enough back in the Service to be particularly aware of, or indeed accustomed to, peace-time Service protocol is said to have replied that he was: lying on my bloody backside and my name is Meirisch. The rather startled O.C then enquired: how do you spell that name?

Geoff not wanting to get into the rather strange spelling of his name replied and perhaps ungraciously:- M E R R I S H and added a quick sir.

The OC then having taken in all of this then said to Geoff in his rather heavily English-accented voice, laddie, I am Air Commodore Garing, Officer Commanding RAAF station Richmond, Report to my office at 0800 hours sharp tomorrow morning.

He then wound up his window along with the command to his driver to drive on.

Promptly, at 0800 hours next morning, Geoff, fully booted and spurred was at Station Headquarters awaiting the O.C's invitation to come in, which was duly given. Geoff having recalled proper military procedure and protocol, virtually marched into the sanctum/sanctorium saluted the Air Cdre who was seated at a rather large oak-desk and smartly said:- Flight Lieutenant Geoff Meirisch reporting to you as ordered last evening, Sir.

The O.C's first question was:- how long have you been here Flight Lieutenant and what are you doing here? I do not recall seeing your visiting cards on the entrance table to the Officer's Mess ante-room.

(It was a well established custom at the time, for all Officers to have properly printed visiting cards with rank and name followed by Royal Australian Air Force. As well as the normal use of

such cards, the Service custom required that on arrival at a RAAF Station on posting, two cards would be placed on the silver salver at the entrance to the Mess, one marked to to the President of the Mess Committee and Officers the other but unmarked, indicated that the donor of the card had arrived on posting. As with most Customs of the Service (a book noted for its essential reading useage and written by an RAF officer Group Captain Stradling) it was really adopting similar well established customs/manners as practised by society/gentry. Each time one was promoted, new cards with the new rank had to be printed.

Geoff, not being aware of this Custom and which had not, for either practical or security purposes, part of the war-time system for commissioned officers, replied to the OC:

I was not aware of the need for visiting cards Sir, had I been aware of the requirement I would have arranged it. The OC's rejoinder to this being:- well you are aware of it now so you better get your backside into gear and have some visiting cards printed right away, Furthermore and as a result of your most un-officer like behaviour and dress last night, I recommend that you get quite a few hundred printed. I say this because, if I have anything to do with it, you are destined to be Flight Lieutenant for a bloody long time.

Bull Garing ([Back](#))

As well as the multitudinous number of command appointments held by Air Cdre Bull Garing he continued and maintained a keenness to fly whilst involved in each



position. Also, as earlier quoted in this narrative, concerning his perhaps flamboyant use of the little Ryan ST whilst at East Sale, something similar emerged to some extent whilst he was at Edinburgh. Again and seemingly for his personal use, he had an aeroplane which when appearing in a circuit at any RAAF airfield the comment could be heard, here's old Bull come to visit us. The aircraft a Meteor, was painted stark white and always looked, as did Bull, very smart indeed. It could well have been a specification colour for this particular aircraft as part of the then Woomera commitment and requirements. However, Bull quite openly relished, with delight and glee, flying the white Meteor with its Bull emblazoned nose and showing it off with each of his flying visits to various places where his presence was required.

When he retired in 1964, to a senior position with the Rothman foundation, he had amassed almost 4,000 hours of flying and had flown command time in over 90 different aircraft types,

Despite some flamboyance and a suggested eccentricity he was one of the unique personalities of his era in the RAAF. He was ultimately respected with great affection the like of which may never again be seen in the RAAF. I particularly coveted my friendship with him during his and my, retirement years.

Vale Bull Garing.



*Anzac (Memorial) Parade Canberra October 1993 [\(Back\)](#)
AirCdre(Ret'd) Bull Garing, Sqn Ldr Gary Ilton, WgCdrs (Ret'd) Ted Ilton and David Oxenham.
(Newly installed Vietnam memorial in background)*

Earlier in this story there is a heading for this section which leads into more of my nomad-ing and RAAF experiences. The two topics which fitted nicely into a once more nomad-continuation with my move to West Sale. Following which, I foreshadow my return to Melbourne and to a PMG environment.

But first, I did find a need to side-track with the story about Beauforts coupled with the personal involvement of Garing and Walker. This, when coupled with my reporting the death of Bull Garing did create some considerable divergence but which, hopefully at the same time, added some reader interest about RAAF history?

So here we are at last, but still in early 1944 and in Flinders Lane Melbourne at the PMG's Postal Training School, where 30 or so contemporaries and I became inaugural students for this new training initiative.

An initiative brought about by an unprecedented increase in Post and Telegraph commitments due to WWII with a resultant need for staff increases particularly in the telegraph area.

Like so many Government Departments, the PMG had a WWII Manpower clause restricting large scale personnel departures to the armed forces. There was none-the-less, a Departmental policy initiative of maintaining a release-to-the-forces roster system enabling a few enlistments each month. Vacancies so created together with increases in work-load, prompted not only a beefed-up training programme but also the recall of literally hundreds of former PMG employees, most of whom had retired at age 65. It was quite astonishing to find, particularly in the Telegraphy area, that most of the retirees being recalled were in their mid to late 70's and, even quite a number, in their 80's, However, although the sedentary style nature of a telegraphist was not physically taxing, their almost instant recall of the Morse Code and their penmanship and key-man-ship of even those in their '80's, was quite remarkable to say the least.

[\(Back\)](#)

I remember not long after I graduated as a Central Telegraph Office telegraphist my being introduced to a new chum on his first day back in the system. His name was Pappy Moyes, 84 years old, He sat down at his Morse key, which he had not touched for 19 years, grabbed a bunch of telegrams ready for transmitting and went ahead as if he had never left the job. This was followed by a similar remarkable achievement when picking up his pen, (one for dipping in ink wells) and proceeding to write in beautiful copper-plate style, a batch of incoming telegrams. He did not miss a beat,

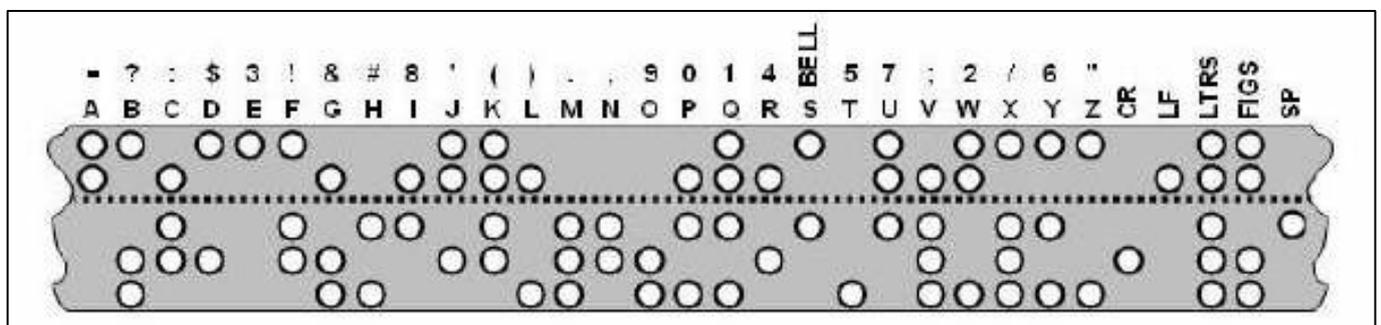


Having now indicated the manning problems in the PMG during WWII, our group of 16 to 18 year-olds soon embarked on pretty much a pressure-packed course of training, prior to which I should add, had been a need to divl'd us into two streams of training. One stream for Telegraphists and another for Postal Clerks.

The two common things in the syllabus were that both categories had to reach much the same skills in Morse code and touch typing. Postal Clerks being destined for Post Offices where all the Morse code work was part of their daily duties. Telegraphists did not as a rule work in Post Offices, the exception being in some of the larger provincial towns like Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong Otherwise they stayed in capital city telegraph offices where their higher proficiency levels were better utilised.

This selection streaming pretty much sorted itself out. I guess an analogy could be made with the selection process for fighter pilots and non-fighter pilots, hand dexterity being key ingredients. I seem to remember that this selection process lasted about four weeks, when we were then split into two groups. The teleg trainees (T.I.T's as we were called, telegs in training, it was not all that strange, given our age and level of testosterone, we knew that tits had another and more stimulating meaning). The Postal Clerks concentrated a lot more on postal procedures, customer public relations and accounting procedures, given their cash-handling duties.

Before proceeding any further, I should expand more on the duties of a telegraphist. Basically, the direct PMG need was for him (later her as well.) to send and receive telegrams principally by Morse code. Until the 1930's, telegrams being received were hand-written so it was not strange that most of the telegraphists up until that time were also neat hand writers. Postal Clerks generally had a similar affinity due to their telegraphy role.



[\(Back\)](#)

British and American telegraphic engineers and doubtless European countries as well, had developed a teleprinter which operated on a punched-5-hole-paper tape. A standard typewriter key-board produced the 5 hole code. The tape as it flowed out from under the key-board was fed into a land-line transmitter and received at the other end by a printer which reproduced it in type-written telegram format. (So it doesn't take a moment to realise that telegraphists not only had to be proficient with the Morse code, but also had to be able to read the punched tape as well). The Railways had a similar system, where a paper tape was fed from a cinema film type reel, but instead of 5-hole-punched tape their system left an inked impression of the Morse code relayed from the adjacent Morse code key operator at the send and receiving end. These skills were usually held by Station Masters and senior Railway porters.

The next step from the punched tape system, was a teleprinter which produced, from a standard keyboard, electric impulses being sent along a land-line to a similar piece of apparatus which typed the message in telegram form. The one restrictive process of each of the systems mentioned above, is that being a wizard touch typist did not mean you would be able to clear traffic quicker than one with less-wizardry, the reason being that too quick a typist confused the slow reacting keyboard.

In the early part of the war as a measure of removing the slowness of the teleprinter key-boards, the Americans designed a teletypewriter, which was a beautiful machine and quite capable of speeds up to 60 wpm. This latter speed of 60 wpm became a corollary for the graduating touch typing speed of a T.I.T of 66 wpm. On the Morse code side a telegraphist was required to be able to send and receive Morse at 25 wpm minimum.

There was nothing particularly exciting about the Postal Training School, key-bashing, Morse or keyboard, took up most of each day, with an attendant steady increase in efficiency. I guess for each of us from the country and that was the majority, coming to a big city coupled with a Treasury concession at that time when each had capital city allowance to defray accommodation charges, each pay day became extra exciting. From memory our salary at that time was about thirty shillings a week, (three dollars). The average boarding-house charge was about seven shillings and sixpence (75 cents) per week. Therefore the living-away allowance at about ten shilling per week, provided fortnightly spending sprees.

I became extremely close mates with a fellow teleg trainee, Charlie Jones, (from a potato farm at Whitlands, near Mt Buffalo). We had both chosen the Northcote YMCA for our lodging house and we used to rld our bikes into the city to school each day.

One of the few high-lights of each week was the creating of a bit of minor (harmless?) chaos during our lunch-breaks. We moved around in a group and after quickly eating our boarding house lunch to take in the midday city street scenes. Scenes, reflecting obvious signs of war-time shortages with queues outside shops and kiosks, particularly outside tobacco kiosks which were generally the longest. We' would queue outside tobacco kiosks which we knew did not open at lunch-time. Our group of about 30 would stand there until there was a similar number (or even more) behind us. We would then run away much to the consternation and abuse from those who thought that their meagre tobacco supply was about to be replenished.

[\(Back\)](#)

One other high-light of the syllabus was the need for the T.I.T's to learn how to operate a telephone switch-board, (holes, cords and plugs) principally because the PMG at the time had, as one of their telegraphic services, a telegram called a Phonogram. Instead of a need to attend at



a Post & Telegraph office to send a telegram, a client could ring the Phonogram Office, for which of course there were additional charges. The service was available on a 24 hour a day basis. Our training venue for this was the Central Telephone Office in Lonsdale street where seemingly, hundreds of ladies of all ages were employed to say number please and even at times, more colourful expressions? Unlike their counterparts at the Phonogram Office, they were allowed to work all around the clock.

Central Telegraph Offices in all capital cities had a co-located Phonogram room, which was operated by lady telephonists between 8 a.m. and 8 pm. Working hours later than this were not permitted by the Union rules of the day for fear of the ladies being pestered by unknown or

unnamed pesterers. Accordingly, telegraphists were rostered for these duties and covered the twelve hours involved each day. Graeme Smith, my mate from West Sale, who had joined me at the Postal Training School and I were well ahead of the game as we had become well-versed on the secrets and mysteries of a telephone switchboard when at West Sale, enabling us to spend a lot of our time trying to woo some of the young telephonists. However, with little or no success, as the Lady supervisors had personalities of Prison guards (a la Prisoner of later TV notoriety). They did seem to be, at the time, to we budding telegraphist/telephonists real dragons. Later on in life, I think we would have described some of them as old boilers.

Perhaps at this stage, I might indulge in an aside, pretty much akin to a later experience when working in the Phonogram Office, which, I might add, was usually the most boring six hour shifts of all the (16) shifts that we had to perform in the CTO. Jumping ahead in time a bit, but apropos to the boring nature of the shift in Phonograms, boring mainly because very few people were Phonogram-inclined during non-business hours. As a result there was nothing happening to keep the clock ticking over. There were some novelty mischief things, which really were only good as a oncer. One of the most popular being ringing all at once, the Chinese restaurants in Melbourne, in those years about a dozen, then connecting all the keys at the same time. The net result was that they could all hear each other and the more they heard the more they jabbered. One couldn't understand a word they were saying but it was quite hilarious.

The other more popular thing is where my aside comes in. As the telephonists at Central would be working the same night hours as us and similarly with not a lot to do, this was fertile ground for some telephone chat with one another, not unlike the chat rooms of the Web of today, but on a more one-on-one more personal voice-to-voice basis.

On my first attempt at this, I encountered a delightfully sweet-voiced young lady called Roma. This was on the first night of the week's shift. She lived at Port Melbourne was Italian, aged 18 and great to talk to. We exchanged photos by mail on the second day. I was surprised to find that she was blonde, as I expected any one from Italy to be dark-haired. As well as a nice voice she was quite pretty, although only a head and shoulders photo, her figure had been left to my imagination. We arranged to meet later in the week when she was similarly as me, on day shift. We agreed, to meet on the steps of the Central Telephone Exchange at 6pm.

I arrived ten minutes early and looked very closely at each blonde that came out at the top of the steps. None matched the photo of Roma. Then right on six o'clock, this rather stout young lady, with a face and hair like Roma's, but certainly not the expected figure, called out Hello Eddie. I had used that name with her as I thought it sounded some-what more adventurous than plain old Ted.

I could not believe my eyes and wondered how I would be able to spend the evening with her, when she was absolutely nothing like I had imagined. Nevertheless I thought I would have to make some sort of chivalrous attempts. Dinner had been mentioned on the telephone and as I was not enough, not yet anyway, of a city slicker to know many nosheries and more to the point, other than the odd milk bar in Elizabeth Street and Coles cafeteria in Bourke Street, which was not open at that hour of the day, I did not really know of anything, cheap or expensive. It was the former in which I was more interested, having regard to the state of my budget.

Roma, then said: How about the Russell Collins?

She might as well have said The Savoy Plaza for all I knew about such places. I pictured, with such a posh sort of name, it would be similarly posh in price? So, very man-of-the-world-ish I said in a less-than-enthusiastic voice: lead the way Roma.

It seemed one heck of a walk from Lonsdale Street, particularly the up-the-hill bit to Russell Street. Once seated, a waitress brought over a menu about the size of the Melbourne Age. Roma did not show any signs of making a quick decision. This heightened my concern that she was looking at the more exotic dishes in keeping with her already gained rotund figure. I was much relieved when she said-

I'll settle for an iced coffee and a toasted ham sandwich and then passed the menu to me. I was more than happy to choose the same when I quickly noted there would be some change out of five shillings. The order was soon served to us and it seemed no time before we were ready to leave the Russell Collins.

It was just starting to get dark and Roma asked if I would like to go to the Fitzroy Gardens. I nearly put my foot in it by suggesting we go somewhere closer, not realising that it was only a five minute walk to Spring Street and the gardens mentioned by Roma. So off we strolled, with not a lot of conversation, other than about the weather, the war-time shortages etc. We entered the gardens and sat on a seat underneath the biggest tree I had ever seen (since learned it to be one of those Moreton Bay figs which grow to immense sizes).

We were just sitting there, I not even venturing to hold hands and the evening twilight had turned to night. After a few minutes, I heard all kinds of scratching and leaf-rustling in the branches above. When, without warning this large grey shape fell out of the tree bang into Roma's lap. The biggest possum I had ever seen. Her reaction, quite predictably to jump up off the seat and start running and screaming at the top of her voice, Just as predictably, I chased after her with a view to catching and then comforting and placating her.

Understandably, other people (young lovers), in the gardens, started chasing after us, their doubtless aim to catch this would-be molester of young (plump) Italian maidens. By the time I caught Roma and my potential assailants caught up to us, I had steadied her down, we were holding hands and the crisis was over.

I couldn't get down to Flinders Street quickly enough to put her on a Tramways Bus to (Garden City) in Port Melbourne. What's more I never again heard nor saw anything of this, no doubt quite nice, young lady. Neither did I ever venture out on a blind date again. With this blind date aside out of the way, we now head back to the Postal Training School, when within a few weeks from graduation as telegraphists within my group, we were thrown into the lion's den. We were in fact introduced for the first time, other than familiarisation visits, to the maelstrom of The Room. The latter was the generic title for the Chief Telegraph Office Operating Room. Where, in its huge expanse, upwards of 150, 200 telegraphists operated during the busy parts of every week day, (Sunday was not busy).

As a measure of qualifying the reason for so many operators, one just has to imagine that with the exception of contemporary and very basic radio and telephone communications of the time, the telegraph was the speediest communication available. Moreover, telegrams were relatively

cheap and universally used, not only for speed, but for quick, short commercial content as well as for private and social (births, birthdays, weddings) messages. (see sample on next page).

The volume of social wedding telegram traffic on any given Saturday was quite unbelievable. When I was first exposed to these types of telegrams I was amazed at the number of double entendre messages that were being sent.

[\(Back\)](#)

One that has stuck in my mind since those days, long, long ago, went something like this:-



CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES FOR YOUR FUTURE HAPPINESS STOP PLEASE SEND MOUNTED PHOTOGRAPH OF BRID AND GROOM.

Additionally, daily telegraph traffic was the principal source for the print media of all but locally gathered news. To this end PMG telegraphists were permanently rostered for duty at The Melbourne Sun, Herald, Argus, Age, Truth and Smith's Weekly together with the Sporting Globe. Also, telegraphists were rostered for race results at the four major Metropolitan race courses, Flemington, Caulfield, Moonee Valley and Mentone. In addition telegraphists were rostered for duty at the Melbourne Show each year.

So, in the Room, the stacks of telegrams coming in from every point imaginable, for delivery around the Melbourne environs, were constant. As too was the through traffic to Post Offices all over Victoria, interstate and for overseas Cables as well, which had to be sorted and distributed throughout the Room by conveyor belts for incoming messages and by circulation staff for outgoing messages.

The noise of conveyor belts, overhead fans, teleprinters, Morse keys, Morse sounders, (a wooden type of Morse resonator), typewriters, conversation, coughing and even telephones was quite nerve-wracking. This was the main reason for all shifts being 6 hours per day. As well as a lunch break of 30 minutes, a relief break was provided each operator by relief-staff telegraphists, on a two hourly basis.

The nicotine habit had become universal, (a sign of adulthood?), practically all teen-age boys smoked. Most men too were smokers. We worked in a Room in which there would hardly be a non-smoking person. So there were early signs of the now tobacco-smoke pollutant nuisance, particularly between the hours of 8 am. And 5pm, Mondays to Saturdays. Regulations had to be introduced restricting the times that a cigarette (pipe or cigar) could be lit-up in the Room. a strictly applied 10 until 10.15 am and 3.pm to 3.15.

Imagine a couple of hundred smokers all lighting up at once, Despite exhaust fans in the ceilings, the atmosphere during the mass light-ups, resembled an industrial site on Dudley Flats Rd, Footscray, This also, was the reason for the other two hourly relief breaks mentioned above, as well as bladder-and-related-relief considerations.

The huge telegraphy and support staff involved, together, with the 16 shift cycles provided for

close staff clerk management. The weekly updated Roster, displayed on a huge notice board in the Room showed each single staff member's cycle 16 weeks ahead. Not only did the Chief Staff Clerk and his minions, have their work cut-out in shuffling people because of illness, but also for reasons of scheduled leave and then there was the added difficulties associated with the complete unpredictability of unscheduled absenteeism.

An additional problem with staff rostering, was one brought about by a long-fought Union battle to enable telegraphist shift swapping with one another. In fact this catered for all sorts of reasons particularly in relation to availability for weekend-sport commitments for the more athletic, fit-bodied, young key-punchers.

A Saturday afternoon off only occurred, in normal rostering, once in about each four weeks. Involvement in organised sport on a regular Saturday afternoon basis would therefore have been impossible. However, with shift swapping sport participants were able to be assured of being off every Saturday afternoon, by swapping for a night shift, e.g 11 p.m to 5 a.m. with fifteen different telegraphists for the next 15 weeks. There was a book for this purpose and you can imagine the hectic activity around the roster board each week of it being up-dated (not forgetting the stomach-ulcer potential for the poor old Staff Clerks who had to, virtually on a daily basis, work these name changes into an already published roster).

Another popular swap method was for non-sportsmen to sell (for 10/-) their rostered off Saturday-arvos. The Pappy Moyes mentioned earlier often sold his and then, due to his longevity-of-tooth, (remember he was 84), he would forget that he had exchanged (sold) his afternoon off and would then take it off anyway, although he should be working. Chaos could then reign supreme. Despite all the possible difficulties, likely confusion and, sometimes a little chaos, the swap system worked remarkably well. In my own case, in order to play Aussie Rules for Glen Iris, I was able to work permanent nightshift for the whole of the footie season. For these sort of purposes, it need not have involved only the 11 pm to 5 am shift. A 6pm to midnight shift would permit a similar shuffle and was also popular.



Our Postal Training School course seemed suddenly to reach finality in no time at all. The final stage, of several times weekly on-the-job training sessions in the Room, became a daily affair following our appointment gazettal in the Commonwealth Gazette as Telegraphists Fourth Division. Not indicating a level of proficiency, but our division in the pecking order of the then, Public Service. Our Postal Clerk compatriots received their appointments to Post Offices in all parts of Victoria, country and suburban, from Rainbow to Rupanyap, Tallangatta to Tallygaroopna, Frankston to Fish Creek,

As a further point of interest at this stage in the narrative, one of our more enterprising Course members, Ken Morley, organised a 50 year anniversary in 1994. He arranged sponsorship with the then Telecommunications Department. It was highly successful and well attended.

With our permanent appointments to the Melbourne office came the cessation of Capital City Allowance. So Charlie Jones and I sought accommodation closer to the city which we found at a boarding house in Cromwell Road South Yarra, We joined seven others, all Public Servants, one of whom George Growcott, a Telephone Technician from Lindenow (in East Gippsland)

and with whom Charlie and I, developed a close friendship. We soon became an inseparable trio. George had already, resulting from a church background, formed a liaison with a Chapel St Richmond Anglican cathedral congregation. Charlie and I soon joined him where we spent many enjoyable social as well as ecclesiastical times.

The Rector at the cathedral was a Reverend Green, whose son Randall, then about a seventeen year old, eventually became a lay-preacher down at Drouin before enlisting in the RAAF, completing a pilot's course and retiring as a Wing Commander in the late 1970's or early 80's, (he and I were with the RAAF's Occupation Forces in Japan at the same time, 1951-52. More about that later, as well as some involvement with George Growcott's parents).

The new group of telegraphists to which we belonged soon assimilated into what was truly a unique band of people. Whilst for some, it was just a stepping-stone in the Commonwealth Public Service. To many, it became not only an elitist sort of involvement, but also a secure, interesting and challenging environment.

It was interesting how we new kids on the block quickly became aware of a pecking order within the Room's inmates. Not so much because of our newness, we knew only too well that we would have to crawl before we walked. The operating posts in the Room to which we were originally assigned would be ones with light traffic and therefore less likely to unnerve us.

The olds and the bolds naturally had a strangle hold on the plum jobs. Given, of course, that because of the uniqueness of these jobs and the responsibility that went with them prompted such assignments to senior highly experienced and most proficient, telegraphists. I refer of course to the jobs that I mentioned earlier at the various newspaper offices, race courses etc. I guess, in this regard, as I seemed to have taken to the telegraphy bit like a duck to water. I worked back as often as I could, not on a paid over-time basis, but to increase my experience levels quicker. This soon paid off as I managed (due to temporary shortages) to get a week in the Herald office which was extremely interesting. My badge of office was a green eye shade, the same as all journalists then wore in a newspaper office. We were given one of these on our first appearance which made us feel right from the start as if we belonged.

In the event, I was not at the CTO long enough to enable me to become a regular in these toffee jobs. Charlie Jones and I, quite luckily, had been chosen to train on the new American teletypes which led to a temporary transfer to the Sydney CTO in Sept. 1945 to form part of a teletype training group among telegraphists of that office. This aspect also leads to the next part of my story.

With thanks to the initiative of Mr Ken Morley, a graduate of the above class (now deceased, 1997), an exceedingly successful luncheon was conducted at a North Balwyn motel in February 1994.

Ken, managed to track down the whereabouts, (or the passing) of each of the graduates of the (inaugural) Class of 1944. Sadly, a few had already passed to that big Telegraph/Post Office in the sky. Of the remainder, there was an 80% attendance, wives/partners were also present. Among the invited guests, were members of the original teaching staff, plus members of Telecom who assisted with sponsorship together with an Address plus souvenir gifts with associated Telecom logos.



The Victorian PMG Postal Training School, Class of 1944, 50 Year Reunion. ([Back](#))

The above photograph is of ten of the original fifteen telegraphist graduates, all aged in their late 60's (little Ted is seated at the left hand end front row)

SYDNEY BOUND, SEPTEMBER 1945 ([Back](#))

The Short-term Sydney Adventure is about to begin and what better way to start than a reminder of the ever beautiful Sydney Harbour Bridge:-

Now, to a little more back-ground concerning Charlie Jones and me being selected for a temporary transfer to Sydney.

You will recall, from a page or two back, my discussing various methods for the transmission and receipt of telegrams i.e the traditional Morse code method of a key to send with and either, the pen and ink, or latterly, the typing of the telegram as it was received by the telegraphist. And, I also mentioned, the various types of teleprinters in use at the time. Among these, the latest version, the Teletype, introduced by the Americans during WWII.



The CTO in Melbourne was the first Telegraph Office in Australia to be equipped with these rather revolutionary machines which had the already mentioned operating speed of 60 wpm, compared to about 25 to 30 wpm for the other, in being, teleprinters.

Chief Telegraph Office, Martin Place Sydney.
[\(Back\)](#)

Charlie and I were introduced to this teletype not long after our graduation. As too were quite a number of other CTO telegraphists. A little while later, the Sydney CTO were being re-



equipped with the same machines and sought some instructional assistance from the expertise within the Melbourne CTO. Applications were invited on our staff notice board. Six were required. Many more than that applied. The four other successful applicants were well-seasoned telegs, in their mid-20's, Jack Mannix, Ian Staley, Tony Ferlazzo and Brian Jefferies.

The plan was for us to be attached to the Sydney office on temporary duty for three months. Neither Charlie nor I had been any further north than the Murray River, so it was the greatest adventure of our life-time up to that point.

The war had just finished and the whole country seemed to be abuzz. We knew the National excitement was far greater than ours, but we looked on ours as a beaut bonus on top of the war being over at last. We journeyed up to Sydney in the Spirit of Progress, on which my mother had been a dining-room attendant in the late 30's and early 40's. It was a delightful journey, the Rolls Royce of trains at the time. The transfer to the Sydney train at Albury, in comparison, I likened to a later learned expression After the Lord Mayor came the night (or some other form of) cart.

Another appropriate expression of not looking a gift horse in the mouth was quite appropriate too. In the event, although we did not have the luxury of sleeping berths for the Albury/Sydney leg, the excitement inured us to any discomforts of the much older NSW rattler. To this day I will never forget my first sight of the old coat hanger, (or the Harbour Bridge by which it was more formally known) visible from our train window somewhere near Strathfield, around 6 or 7 in the morning.

The Staff clerks at the Melbourne CTO had been extremely attentive to our movement/accommodation requirements. They liaised with their Sydney counterparts who arranged for us to live in a boarding house at Brighton le Sands, right on Botany Bay and which could (just) accommodate the six of us.

The Landlady, (Mrs Sadie Thomas), on first meeting, took Charlie's and my mind back to the Central Telephone Office and the old Boilers/trainee Prison Warders who worked there. These thoughts were even further consolidated when soon after arrival, I had the need to visit the loo and whilst seated and making myself comfortable I read a quite large hand-written list of rules on the back of the door. These, basically, were the rules of the house, the last of which in

bigger writing, exhorted all users that anyone caught pissing on the floor would result in immediate expulsion from No 10 Thomas Street (which was the address of the boarding house). However our opinion of Sadie soon changed. She was like an old mother hen, a great cook, could not do enough for us (although she'd always said to us, when the subject of Victorian people came up, that she was suspicious of anyone from bloody Melbourne).

As a result we were most punctilious about obeying the rules of the house and, particularly, the exhortation about not fouling the toilet floor. Not so much for the fear of incurring her wrath, but mainly because there was no way that any one of the six of us would want to jeopardise our continued living in this little piece of Walhalla at Thomas Street.

There were lots of other benefits that the good fortune of temporary duty in Sydney brought to each of us. Not mentioned in any particular order, but those that come to mind were a renewal, at least for Charlie and me, of the capital city allowance and a first time for this concession for the other four, who were similarly overjoyed. We were to work a five day week, from nine to five would you believe, No Saturday or Sunday work. And to see us, strutting around the Sydney CTO room like prize peacocks protecting our chicks (yes the teletypes, not the Sydney telegs). Although, like Melbourne (which I have not mentioned heretofore) the Sydney CTO was introducing female telegraphists. It was nice keeping abreast of some of these lasses as well as the various idiosyncrasies of a teletype keyboard. It was also necessary at times to lean over quite close to gul'd some of their nervous little fingers over the keyboard. ([Back](#))



Travel to and from work was a bit of an experience. It took a tram and train rld to do this. The tram was one the shortest tram lines in Australia, about 3 miles, running from Rockdale Station to the Brighton-le-Sands baths. The tram itself was something to see to believe, (and they had

them all over Sydney). They called them the toast racks. This name because they had face-to-face seating across the width of the tram, about 12 to each compartment (6 each side) all with entries without doors. The conductor, to collect his fares and direct proceedings back to the driver, walked up and down on a running-board, loaded with a heavy bag and tickets. (heavy because the fare was 2 pennies (tuppence) so his bag generally was filled with those rather large coins. He did this in all weathers mind you, had no protection from rain, of icy blasts, in winter, off Botany Bay.



At the same time, he had to sell tickets, keep control of his bag, keep his hat on his head and hang on for dear life when the tram got up some pace and started to rock, I still cannot believe that [\(Back\)](#) Safety Regulations permitted these sort of work standards.

Trams were fairly frequent. As a rule, we six sat with the same other six each morning and sometimes again on the return. A journey which took about 35 minutes each way. We played poker with our tram tickets every morning, (not on the way home though, cos the same faces weren't always there). The game worked by betting your tram fare as to who had the best poker hand amongst the numbers printed on each ticket. The winner would stand to win eleven tuppences, enough to buy a nice sandwich and trimmings for lunch that day. We would then catch a train from Rockdale to the City, which ran express to Strathfield and then again to St James underground station with about a ten minute walk to the CTO.

The return journey each afternoon, whenever I think about it now, reminds me and regrettably, that even still in these current times, the folly of peer-group-pressure and the allowing of such pressures ever to occur.

As I mentioned, the other four were much older than us, terrific guys though and we did get on so well. However, the life of a telegraphist did, at times, require some sort of stress-releasing palliative. At those times, (as indeed still now?), it was brown in colour, with a froth on top and served in Melbourne, in a pot sized glass, or in Sydney, where the pot substituted for a middy.

Our four mates having been telegs for about six years, had occasioned this form of palliative on a regular basis. The move to Sydney did not herald any need for a change to this practice. (when I was in a position to compare, I don't, to this day, know how anyone could drink Sydney beer at all at that particular time. It could not have been compared with Victoria beer, thankfully it did improve by the time I got the taste for a glass of beer).

I was talking about the return journey home each day and peer group pressure. Well it happened to me on the first two afternoons en route from the CTO to the train. Incidentally, I must say, that other than a taste given a child by a parent (or other adult) I had never indulged in alcohol. (in any event I was only just 18 wasn't I,?).

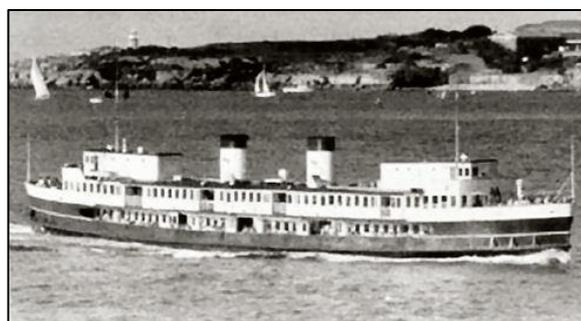
Charlie Jones was of the same mould, but had a greater belief than me in the pressure I've been talking about. In fact I did not seem to recognise it as a problem, part of growing up following your mates etc etc. And, follow them I did, into the Adams Bar in Castlereagh Street on the way to St James Station the first day.

The grown-up four reasoned on that first day, there was only time for 3 beers (schooners), calculated on two facts, the bar closed at 6 pm and our express train left St James at 6.12. This

didn't really concern Charlie because there was no alcohol inclination in him at all. The big worry seemed to be, their concern as to remembering who would have the first shout tomorrow? They then reasoned that the greater the number involved in the school, the easier the maths would be? Charlie said he would join in but would only drink lemonade and then no more than two. This seemed to add another compounding factor to the maths problem? Then they chided me, having heard my I don't drink plea and that I'd join Charlie with the lemonade. They eventually urged me to have a schooner. And, feeling very adult and wanting to be like them, I agreed. In the event, I knew two glasses of lemonade might not be easy in quick time but three schooners of beer would prove just too much. How right I was, after two and not liking the taste, my stomach rebelled and I had to rush to the toilet, where, to use a rather coarse expression of the day, I called H E R B, After two afternoons of this, I could not handle it anymore. It was not for any real conviction about the wisdom of not following my Peers that convinced me. It was simply the fact that drinking beer so quickly and in such volume just made me painfully sick.

Surprisingly my four elderly peers said, when I made this decision, what took you so long to wake up. I do believe now that they were teaching me some sort of lesson regarding, moving into things quietly. Rather than wanting to do what the big boys do before reaching the maturity level for making one's own decisions. Anyway, for the rest of our time in Sydney, they had three schooners every evening in Adam's Bar. Charlie and I had 2 lemonades and we had no difficulty either with the maths as to whose shout it was.

Like most tourists/visitors to Sydney for the first time, particularly in the era in which I am narrating, if there was time, a trip on the Manly ferry was a must. It was really something in those days. The ferries seemed like ships to us and the trip across the harbour, on a nice sunny day, with the wind in your face was a real treat. As too, at weekends, were the strolling musicians who kept moving around the ferry while playing popular tunes of the day, song hits of the war were particularly in demand at request time. ([Back](#))



The portion of the trip, across the heads, was always good for a bit of a roll of the ferry. Some days it was more than a roll too. I can remember walking out of the CTO one afternoon after work and noting a headline on the front page of the Daily Mirror, 'MANLY FERRIES BASHED BY HEAVY SEAS.

On arrival at Manly there were lots of choices to be made, a swim in the beach lagoon and a go on all the fun of the fair slides, turning wheels etc. Or a walk down through the main street for a swim in the surf and some fish and chips, or prawns, on the walk back. If it was prawns, we would buy them at the ferry terminal, dangle our legs over the wharf's edge, peel the prawns and ask the question, wondering what the poor people were doing at the time? From memory, the round trip was only sixpence, which you paid by token on the way across, (as now), but the difference between then and now, you could stay on all day, going back and forth. It is now a requirement to insert a ticket or token at both the Circular Quay terminal and at the wharf at Manly.

As our time in Sydney had the approaching warmer weather accompanying it, we decided as a group, (we always went everywhere together), to try a different surf beach each Sunday until

time for returning to Melbourne, We started at Palm Beach, one of the surf beaches north of Manly and we finished up at Stanwell Park, down near Wollongong. The latter was about a 3 hour steam train journey but well worth it, for on arrival the scenery, the beach and the surf were terrific. It was 45 years later in 1990 when visiting our son Gary who was living in Sydney at the time, drove us there for a swim and a barbecue. It was just as beautiful as I remembered it, with the added bonus of the dozens of beautifully coloured and graceful Hang Gliders soaring from the top of the cliffs overlooking the beach.

In later years and even still now, I shoot a pretty good line amongst New South Welsh folk about how I used to play football for St George in 1945. But before they embarrass me by asking for my autograph, I hurriedly tell them that St George also had an Aussie Rules team then and it was not difficult to get a game. There were very few Aussie Rules players in Sydney. I had three games with them when they were a player (or two) short.

As each of the six of us, were fitness fanatics, we had a morning ritual during the week, of a run along the Brighton beach followed by a swim in the Brighton baths (below). There was also a gym at Rockdale which we frequented two or three nights a week.



[\(Back\)](#)

Speaking of Rockdale provides me with another opportunity for an aside. Being aware that at this time I was eighteen years old, readers will wonder as to why there has not been any mention of affairs of the heart since the rather abortive blind-date with Roma back in Melbourne the previous year. Well there was one incident that happened at the Rockdale picture theatre a few weeks before we were due to return to Melbourne. It was almost as embarrassing, to me anyway, as the previous occasion in the Fitzroy gardens and could have ended in serious

injury. It involved a lass from the CTO.

Many of the circulation staff in both the Melbourne CTO and that of Sydney, were young girls about our own age. It was easy to get to know most of them because they were backwards and forwards to your work station every few minutes during the day with telegrams to be sent. However, I didn't have many opportunities because I worked mainly night shift in Melbourne, when circulation staff were not required. But, in Sydney where I worked day shift each week, this offered good opportunities to get to know the girls.

One of the lasses that I did get to know well, through daily chat and occasional meetings in the staff tea room lived at Sans Souci which was not all that far from Brighton or Rockdale. Coincidentally, I also ran into her at the Rockdale gymnasium one night and from this I invited her to the pictures at the Rockdale cinema the next Saturday night which she accepted.

In those days, the main social outing for the week, (if one didn't count church on a Sunday) was a night out at the pictures on Saturday night. Or a less regular night out at a Dance hall somewhere. (I ruled myself out of the latter occasions on account of I just couldn't dance. This being another effect of my early teen years being spent in other than normal domestic/family situations where learning-to-dance opportunities were more readily available).

Anyway, back to the Rockdale Theatre. Being on a capital city allowance again, the shekels were reasonably flush at times other than just on a pay-day. So the scorched (and chocolate coated) almonds were procured, the best seats in the upstairs lounge were booked and a pleasant evening was looked forward to by all. (another good feature of the pictures was the comparative privacy in the darkened theatre when the holding of hands could extend to a hurried peck on the cheek, or even a proper kiss' whatever that was??). So all went well, I met Rae (her name) at the Rockdale station and we walked to the Cinema. I strutted into the foyer with the lassie by my side, pompously smirking to the usherette and saying: we're sitting in the Lounge if you don't mind Miss to which we were duly escorted upstairs and to the comfortable seats in front of the dress circle. (It's a wonder that she didn't hit pompous me with her torch? which they carried in those days for late comers).

Came interval, (there were always two screenings, a minor movie in the first half and the major feature in the second), which lasted about 20 minutes, most patrons would go out into the foyer for a cigarette, a cool drink or a trip to the loo. Both Rae and I favoured the latter.

Not having been at the Rockdale cinema before I was not sure where the Loo's were located, however, in those days it was usual for the Ladies to be at one end of the foyer and the Gents at the other. Quite often there was an illuminated sign, the men's being a top hat and cane and the Ladies, a figure in a pompadour style gown and a parasol held over the head. I could see in the distance the sign for the Gents near a huge potted palm.

There was a little urgency in the state of my bladder, so, I excused myself from Rae, quickened my step, rushed down the foyer, brushed aside the rather large palm fronds extending towards the loo door, took a step forward and finished up flat on my back. What I did not know was that the whole wall was a floor to ceiling mirror. The palm was only half a palm in half a pot. I'd run into the mirror at almost full clip, The Gents toilet was reflected down the other end of the foyer alongside the Ladies, where Rae had gone. She having known the lay-of-the-land (no doubt being previously cinema accompanied by more knowledgeable lotharios than me) Rae had not

noticed my dilemma, having already started powdering her nose at the time of my mid-air collision. She couldn't help but notice it though when I re-joined her complete with a large lump and abrasion on my forehead which I explained was nothing really. (At least I thought to myself, this time there was no bloody big possum or hysterical screaming going on). As our time in Sydney was coming to a close I did not pursue my temporary liaison with Rae instead, as they say in the classics. there were bigger fish to fry. Unbeknown to us at the time, the RAAF were seeking from the PMG, four telegraphists to work in their Meteorological Section at the Cairns aerodrome. Both Charlie Jones and I got to hear about this, from a mutual teleg friend, Graeme Coker, back in the Melbourne office.

Charlie and me. Sydney 1945. ([Back](#))



We both put in a bid and I sometimes wonder whether our success was very much governed by the fact that we were already out of the Melbourne office, so our further absence up at Cairns was not going to aggravate the situation?

OFF TO NORTH QUEENSLAND. ([Back](#))

So just before Christmas 1945, we were on our way to another new adventure, North Queensland Here We Come. The next section of my story will cover another RAAF experience, at No 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight (a Clayton RAAF if you like, being in the RAAF when not in the RAAF), and, you will note as we read on, there are quite different circumstances and adventures to that which I had experienced and enjoyed down at West Sale.

With the recent rail trip from Melbourne to Sydney still fresh in our minds, Charlie and I were wondering what the standard of trains was likely to be for our long, two thousand mile, rail trip from Sydney to Cairns. Being still somewhat chastened by the comparison between the Spirit of Progress and the old NSW Rail rattler we had travelled in from Albury to Sydney.

The morning dawned when we reluctantly said farewell to our other four teleg chums from the Melbourne CTO who were returning thereto. In addition our farewells with Sadie Thomas, our wonderful land-lady, were in some ways even more reluctant. We were quite sure that destiny would return us to Melbourne after our Cairns stint and with it the re-uniting with Ian, Jack, Tony and Brian would be pretty much a matter of course, assuming of course, that they would not have been transferred elsewhere.

Poor old Sadie, God bless her, was quite tearful when the departure time came. I am sure that the fondness for us that had developed would even, had circumstances so dictated, allowed for a valedictorial fouling of the toilet floor. I also seem to remember that we had arranged to leave her with some suitable photographs of each of the six of us which were duly and tearfully too, I might add, presented to her the day we departed.

Charlie and I, on severing, for the time being, the strong ties that had developed with our four mates, began to wonder who our new, two only, teleg mates would be? As it turned out, the Graham Coker, who I mentioned earlier and who had been a member of our T.I.T's course in Melbourne, became our third member, with whom we later rejoined soon after our arrival in Cairns. The fourth member, a teleg from the CTO in Adelaide, arrived in Cairns a few days after us. Our role with the RAAF was still not clearly defined although we knew this would soon be known. All we did know was that it did involve receiving by Morse code of various meteorological reports from North and South of Cairns and from various small islands out in the Coral Sea. These would then be translated by RAAF Meteorologists into forecasts for RAAF use.



RAAF Cairns Meteorological Office. 1945 ([Back](#))

Our Joining Instructions did not throw any further light on our Duty Statements but they did tell us that we would be billeted, in the first instance, at the RAAF's No 25 Operational Base Unit and that we would be entitled to membership of the Sergeant's Mess, (similar to the West Sale

arrangement). A mud map was also part of the Instructions. This showed the locale of the Unit as being on the Esplanade directly across from the sea. (I quickly imagined, waving coconut palms in the moonlight, the strumming of melodious guitars a gentle breeze off the Pacific and maybe a grass-skirted dusky maiden or two doing a gentle hula on the golden sands), (what an imagination I hear you say?, what a bloody idiot would have been said by any Cairns local as I was to find out).

*RAAF Catalina, also known
as The Black Cat*

[\(Back\)](#)

Anyway, less of the dreaming about idyllic tropical settings and back to the reality of the pending lengthy train journey of about 2,000 miles from Sydney to Cairns.



Charlie and I were still wondering whether the same comparison would obtain between the Spirit of Progress and the NSW Rail rattler in which we suffered from Albury to Sydney.

On arrival at the steam platform at the very busy Sydney Central Railway Station and being directed to the Brisbane Limited which I think it was called, we were soon to understand what the Limited bit meant. Limited in space and comfort. The space was over-taxed in our compartment for eight. Accompanying us were five soldiers and a lass who I remember was a nurse.

And now, many years later after hearing a funny story about, six not eight, travelling in the same compartment in a train, I thought about our travelling companions on that Cairns train, a common thread with both stories being a matter of tobacco smoking

The scene for the story goes something like this:-

The Scottish express was travelling to London during World War Two, in one of the compartments were seated a Bishop, a Rear Admiral, an Air Vice-Marshal, a Brigadier and, what appeared to be a very nervous young RAF Corporal and also a young lady. The train had not long begun its journey when the Air Vice-Marshal having noticed the young Corporal's air of apprehension and nervousness, said to him:- Relax laddie, don't let all this rank over-power you. The Corporal replied: It's not the rank of each of you gentlemen Sir, it's about the purpose of my trip in this train. I'm off to Air Ministry for an appointment concerning my application for a commission.

The AVM then indicated: there is not a lot to it. Just be yourself and answer the questions truthfully and preferably without hesitation.

The others, overhearing the conversation, gave some sage-like nods when the Corporal then intoned: the question that worries me Sirs, is the one when they ask me about my parents and then may find out that I am an illegitimate. Strange, says the AVM and such a coincidence, I too am illegitimate and it has not stopped me from being commissioned and, as you've no doubt

noted, reaching Air rank. With that, the other three male travellers, commented almost as one: as to their being illegitimate also and that this has not impeded their promotion to senior positions.

The young lady having heard all of this put a cigarette in her mouth and after fumbling in her bag for a light, turned around and asked: can I trouble one of you bastards for a light.

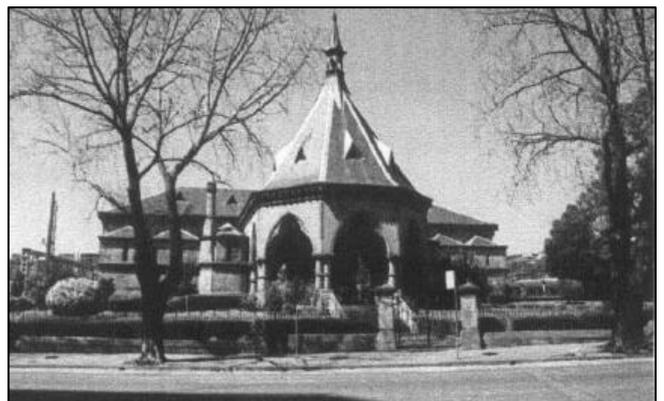
With that little bit of WWII humour out of the way we must get back to Central Station in Sydney.

Whether one lived in Sydney, or was an occasional visitor, Central imposed itself those days as a hive of rail activity and was something of which to be a part. Particularly, with the World War, still a very recent memory and even more particularly, with so many of the steam train travellers being in uniform, a large proportion of whom were just arriving back from the Islands and en route to country New South Wales destinations or to those in Southern and Western States.

Charlie and I were able to capture all of this, having arrived at Central in plenty of time to catch our north-bound train. We even had time to walk the length of the main No 1 platform, hoping to get a closer look at what had been a twice daily sighting by us from our to and from work-train window. And I refer to the Rookwood Cemetery Platform of which we had never seen the like. It is still there (2004) and some readers of this book may well have seen it. But for those who haven't, it was built along the lines of a miniature Gothic cathedral. The Hearses of the day (originally horse-drawn) would pull up at this Rookwood platform and the coffin would be removed to the adjacent small Gothic style sand-stone church. A funeral service would be conducted therein, then coffin and mourners would board a special funeral train for the graveside ceremony at the Rookwood cemetery, (out in the vicinity of the now Olympic Games and Village venue).

If my memory serves me correctly, the little Church was moved stone by stone, in the late 1970's and re-erected on a church (C of E(?))site at Dickson in Canberra. Subsequent to this and sadly, the Rookwood Platform at Central Station really fell into rather desperate disrepair and remained that way for many years. Thankfully it was fully restored, in external appearance anyway, for the Sydney Olympics of 2000. I believe it is now available for hire by the public for a variety of social events of which one, is definitely not that associated with the passing on to the next world.

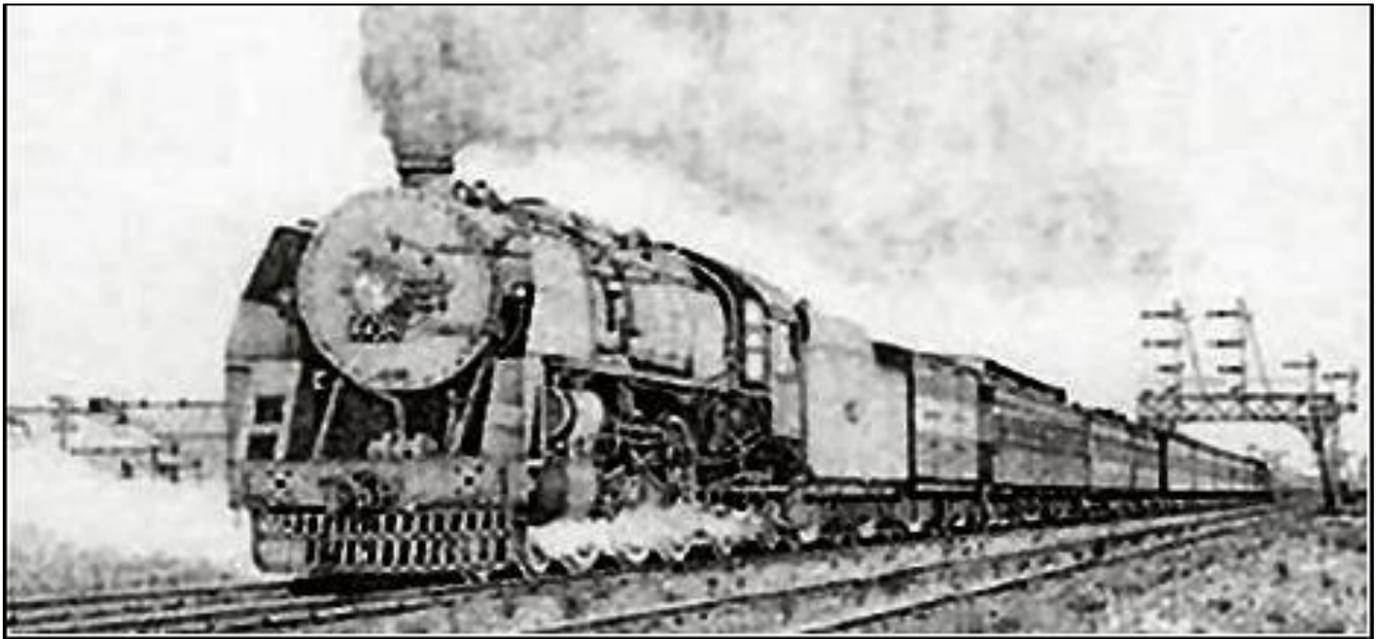
Rookwood Mortuary Platform ([Back](#))



By the time that Charlie and I had made our foray into the state of the art of Central Stations' Rookwood Mortuary, as it was originally known, it was time to make our way back to where our Brisbane train was preparing, with steam hissing, for its journey

I cannot recall the time of our departure other than it was evening and once through the tunnels of the Karingai Chase National Park and even before we got to the Hawkesbury bridge, it was dark. To the best of my memory, which during the putting together of this narrative, had some

lapses, I think we arrived at South Brisbane about mid-morning.



NSW Railways Steam Passenger Train Mid-1940's. (a pencil drawing)

We did have the afternoon in Brisbane which, to me then, was more of a big country town than a National State capitol. Although we had not gone all that far North in the scheme of our ultimate destination and being early December, we did notice what we now know as some sub-tropical humidity, an unpleasant moisture amidst the warmer temperatures which was to become even more oppressive up in North Queensland.

The Queensland Rail train which we caught from the Roma Street station in Brisbane was best described as quaintly old-worldish, not that my rather restricted worldly experience gave me much of a yard stick. I do remember though the small fans in the ceilings of the carriages and the glass water bottles, complete with detachable drinking glasses generously displayed through-out the train.

***Sydney Central Railway Station
Passenger Concourse***



Once we got rolling there did not seem to be any great element of speed. From what I can remember of the time-table, the scheduled run was about 36 hours. Our fellow travellers each from places at, near, or well north, of Rockhampton, asserted that the Queensland trains were the slowest in Australia. One of them even illustrated the point by telling the story of the Conductor (also ticket examiner and collector) who would sprinkle tomato seeds from a window in the front carriage and by the time he walked to the back of the train they were nearly ripe for picking. This was gilding the lily of the slowness of the trains a bit, but by golly it was a painfully slow journey. Our journey was made slower by the number of times we were shunted into a siding to allow troop

trains from the North to pass us on their journey south, crammed with troops still being repatriated from the South Pacific war zones. (There was similar activity the first few months of our airfield employment at Cairns with a constant stream of both Australian and American aircraft, with similar pay- loads of returning servicemen).

I do remember quite distinctly our stopping at Cardwell for breakfast on the first morning, when we all left the train and walked down to the main street for a typically country-town-cafe-ish big breakfast. The return-to-the-train signal was by whistle blasts from the Train Engine Driver. One short blast was a five minute warning then 2 blasts for a second warning, when three blasts were signalled the train would slowly start to move with a result that many remains of a sausage, or cup of coffee, was being eaten on-the-run to the train.

You can imagine what a few stops like this did to the train's schedule over the next day or so. Some forty-seven years later (1991), my wife Mattee and I, on a drive from the Gold Coast to Port Douglas, had our breakfast at the very same cafe. There'd no doubt been some staff changes in the interim, but little or no change to the magnificent breakfast.

Another feature of the trip that sticks in my mind was that in Rockhampton the railway line went right up the middle of the main street for some distance. It was usually at walking pace to enable one of the train staff to walk in front of the train to urge stray cattle, (or people?), to get out of the way.



Off the coast at Cardwell. ([Back](#))

Cardwell was about the first time we had seen any stretch of water since the Hawkesbury. As we pulled into the station the view to the east was encompassed by a magnificent vista of the Pacific Ocean, with, I think, two, beautifully close inshore islands as something of a frame to the picture.

So the train struggled on. The further north that we travelled the more sugar cane plantations we saw. We eventually arrived in Cairns about 9 pm on the third night. Melbourne at the time seemed to us to be at the other end of the earth. We did not need to adjust to the heat, there

being no air conditioning in trains in those days, the ambient temperature in the train had been the same as outside.

This too was our first close experience with the American army jeep although we had seen many of them racing around the streets of Melbourne, Sydney and latterly Brisbane. These sightings occasioned by the extra-ordinary large contingents of US troops in all Australian cities from early 1942 until a year or more after the war. A RAAF jeep picked up Charlie and me, together with what now seemed to be rather meagre luggage, in which I might add was contained all our worldly possessions. A far-cry from a similar situation these days when an assortment of wheeled luggage accompanies each trip, short or long,

Our young air force driver did not have much to say. I daresay he was a bit bewildered not knowing how to handle two, relatively young, 18 year-old civilians. Neither was it an appropriate time for a Cook's tour of this northern outpost. By the speed in which he drove, he was hell-bent on getting back to the Base camp for either some shut-eye or to continue what he had interrupted to meet our train.

I must say as we drove towards our camp along the Esplanade, my earlier day-dreaming of what to expect was not too far from the truth. The moon was shining, the water was glinting, the coconut palms were gently swaying in the late evening breeze. In fact the only thing lacking was the sound of a ukulele and the rustling of the grass skirts of a dusky maiden or two, a la Treasure Island. Being ready for the cot, I knew further exploration could wait until dawn, when fully equipped with swimming togs, towel and then the mad rush for a dip in the jolly old surf I could gambol about like a fool on a holiday. I had not particularly shared these thoughts with Charlie. However, he the inveterate conservative, just took things as they came and wherever possible, in the right order.

Our driver showed us to our 2 man tent, complete with two beds (cyclone gates on folding legs) with straw-filled palliases for a mattress, a rough looking striped calico pillow (without pillow-case) and that was it. Oh. I forgot the ubiquitous mosquito net over the bed being a part and parcel of every bed in the north.

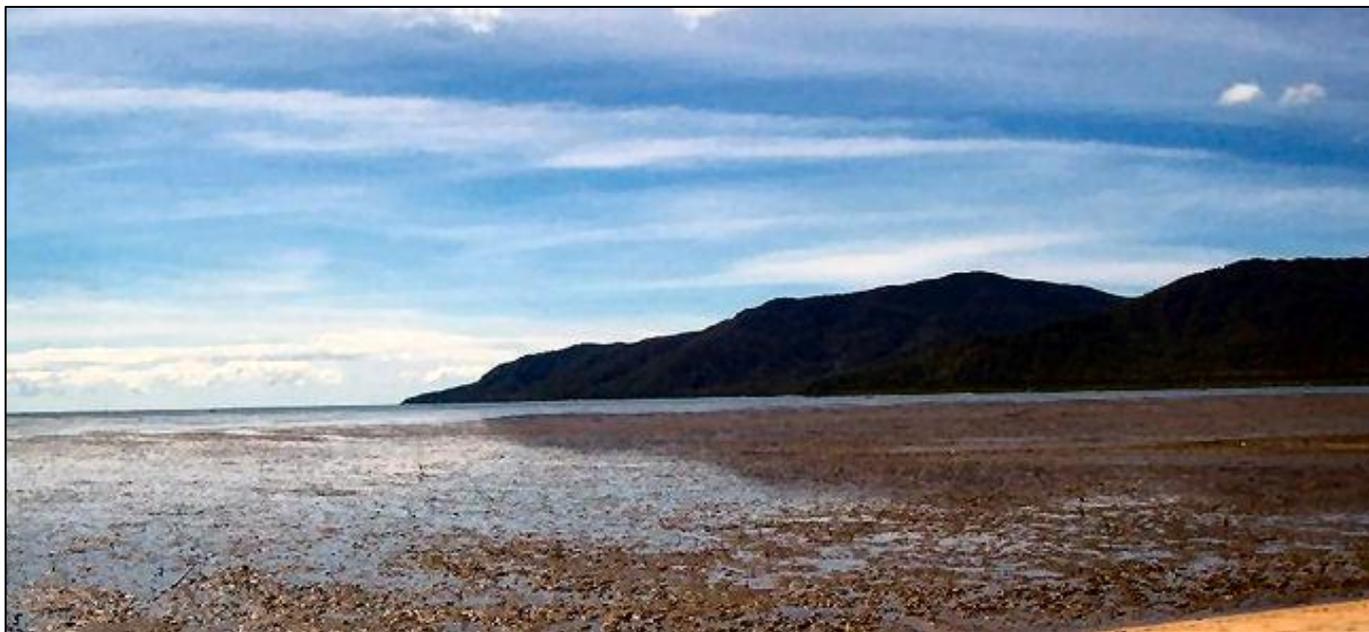
We was so exhausted after the long train trip that we did not even think about food. A handy drink service was readily available in the shape of a water bag (canvas material) hanging from an adjacent frangipani tree.

The noises from the jungle, which were more than audible, were coming from the myriad of giant fruit-bats which we found out later, invaded the whole of the Cairns coastal strip as soon as the last ray of light disappeared. You're probably like me at this stage, waiting for the night to pass quickly and the dawn bringing the splashing and general light heartedness in the beautiful waters of the Pacific, just outside our tent-flap,

At 5 a.m., the flying foxes had winged their way back to the hills at the bottom of the Atherton Ranges, the sun was just peeping over the horizon, Charlie Jones was still quietly snoozing and young Teddy was leaping off his cyclone gate bed and in his haste, tangling with his bloody mosquito net. Grabbing his togs and putting them on in a thrice (quickly,) he grabbed his towel and headed for the beach.

Were there any calm waters of the Pacific? Were there any golden sands of a tropical beach?

Not on your Nellie on either count, there was nothing but a sea of mud for as far as the eye could see. It was then I learned to my dismay, chagrin and complete lack of a sense of humour, that there was no beach on the Cairns Esplanade, (in fact the closest was about ten miles away, up towards Yorky's Knob).



[\(Back\)](#)

So it was at each daily low tide, the mud flats appeared and the beautiful panorama disappeared. (It is pertinent to note at this point that only recently, 2003, an artificial beach (similar to South Bank in Brisbane but much bigger) was created in the city area of the Inlet shores.

I was so disappointed that I did not even taste one bean of the pork and beans that we had for breakfast. Even my very first taste of a tropical Paw Paw, was lost on me.

As the day unfolded we learned that this would be the only night that we would spend at the 25 OBU camp. The Cairns RAAF authorities had been trying to make up their mind as to the most practical locale for our accommodation. Out at the airfield which was to be our place of work, but where there were no longer any RAAF quarters, (the war-time huts having already been sold by the Defence Disposals Dept), or in town at Kuranda Barracks which were the Catalina squadron personnel were quartered.

On that first day, when the location for our quarters was still being determined, Charlie and I made our way to the Cairns Post Office, to meet the Postmaster, who was attired in the tropical uniform for Public Servants i.e. long-sleeved white shirt, tie, long white trousers and brown shoes. He indicated that he would be our local Departmental gul'd and mentor during our time working with the RAAF, (he must have noted some latent leadership qualities in young Ted because he made me OC troops of the whole four of us, forthwith). The news of this would be passed on to Graeme Coker on his arrival and also to the chap from Adelaide.



This photograph of Cairns depicts the city at the turn of the century, 2000. Slightly left of the multi-storied building centre left of the picture is the general area where the RAAF's 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight was located immediate post-war. ([Back](#))

At that time there was a group of war-time Defence buildings which had the title of Kuranda Barracks and which had been an Australian Naval Shore establishment before the RAAF took over.

The Cairns inlet is very clearly defined and at the time that this particular part of the narrative was taking place, late 1945 early 1946 there were upwards of six to eight Catalinas moored at various parts of the Inlet.

Depending on winds, the direction of the Inlet provided an almost perfectly aligned path for flying boat landings and take-offs. A RAAF Marine Section, together with flying boat operation work-boats and crash-boats was conveniently located adjacent to the eastern end of the Burns Philp wharf.

He also gave us the glad news that our telegraphy post had to be manned 24 hours a day and that the easiest and fairest way to manage this would be on a shift rotational basis of 6 hours on and 18 off in succession for each of us.

The various bits of paper-work were then attended to for such things as pay, person to be notified etc in case of accidents or emergencies. I had to think about that one, so I nominated my 21 year old sister, then living in Malvern, a Melbourne suburb, while her sailor husband was away at the War. (I mentioned Dad also for this purpose and who was still living in Warragul).

We were then left to our own devices when we made our way down to the waterfront and in particular Kuranda Barracks which on first sight would be the preferred address for us during our time in Cairns. It overlooked the water, the lazy bobbing of the moored Catalinas could be seen with their noses pointing towards the direction of the tide/wind. Moreover, the Cairns swimming baths (as they were called in those days) were right next door with a connecting gate. Right opposite on the diagonal corner, next door to one another were the Strand and Pacific hotels, more of which will be mentioned later on.

We had been instructed to be back at the camp by mid afternoon, by which time, when hopefully, our domicile would have been determined. As soon as we got back we were told that Kuranda Barracks it was to be. I must say both Charlie and I were pleased with the news. We were quite impressed with the set-up there together with the convenience of all the local points of interest and needs. Additionally, the swimming pool being right next door was an extra bonus.

Transportation to our place of employment out at the drome had also been fixed with a rather convenient arrangement in which a jeep would be involved. The plan was that the on-going shift teleg, would be driven out to the drome from Kuranda Barracks. Then the reverse would occur for the off-shift teleg for the return journey to Kuranda This meant that the jeep would be only away from its normal commitment for the time that it took to make the journey out and back.

We transferred our gear and ourselves to our new home on the second day. Our sleeping accommodation was provided in long huts, in which an average of ten people lived. Depending on the comings and goings, people on leave, people being posted south, etc. etc. there never seemed to be a time, when the huts were fully occupied. As it turned out, it was only a short-term arrangement for us as we did, a few months later, move out to RAAF accommodation on the boundary of the aerodrome.

Although not in keeping with the customs of segregation in Air Force messes, i.e. officers in their own mess, senior NCO's (Sergeants, Flight Sergeants and Warrant Officers) in their's too and similarly Corporals, Leading Aircraftmen and Aircraftmen also to their own Mess. Due however, to the relatively small numbers of senior NCO's and Officers, their two messes were combined. In the dining room there was a partition to form the semblance of separate areas to eat. Similarly, the Mess bar areas were partitioned off. However, with the war now over and the main priority being a posting south for discharge, the mixing of the Messes did not present any problems. There was no lowering of Service discipline and respects were still paid and the traditions, so long part and parcel of Service life, were being maintained.

Having unpacked our hand-full of possessions and familiarised ourselves with the messing arrangements as well as the location of the ablutions (showers and toilets), Charlie and I made noises about getting out to the drome to find out what occurs at that end of the ship, So, while awaiting some transport for this purpose and seeing how in the next few pages the dear old Catalina is going to be mentioned here and there, I thought it might be appropriate to give some details and specifications of this rather remarkable aircraft.

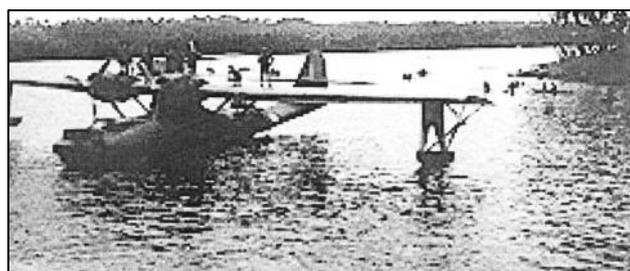
The Catalina was built in the late 1930's to the specifications of the US Defence Department for providing a long-range flying boat, primarily for reconnaissance purposes.

Its vital statistics were as follows:-

Engines: 2 X Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp 1200 h.p
Dimensions: Wing span, 31.7 m (104 ft). Length, 10.45 m (63 ft 10 in). Height, 5.65 m (18 ft 10 in)
Performance: Maximum speed: 179 knots (315 kph). Range cruising speed: 102 knots (188 kph). Initial climb: 201 m. per min. (660 ft pm). Service ceiling: 5,517 m. (18,100 ft). Maximum range 4,989 km (2,694 nm)
Crew: Normally 8
Weights: Empty: 7,950 kg (17,526 lb). Max loaded 15,422 kg (34,000 lb)
Armament: 2 x 0.5 in and 1 x 0.303 in machine guns bow turret and two waist blister positions. Up to 1,814 kg (4,000 lb) of bombs, depth charges or torpedos under wings.
RAAF Service: 1941 to 1950 with No's 11, 20, 42 & 43 Squadrons. No 6 & 8 Com Units & No;s 111,112,113 & 114 Air Sea Rescue Flights.

The first seven PBY-5 Catalina Flying Boats were ordered for the RAAF in June 1940, with more to follow in September. The first of the Cats were ferried to Australia by RAAF and Qantas crews. After Japan's entry into the war, the loss of ten of the first batch of eighteen aircraft led to an urgent need for replacements. By the time the last Catalina was delivered in September 1945, Australia had received 168 of type. Of these 46 were PBY5-A amphibians, 29 of these being converted to flying boats by removal of their undercarriages and these were re-designated PBY5A-(M). The Cats behaved impressively. Early in their careers, the PBY's of 11 and 20 Squadrons, in New Guinea, were used as bombers, in attacks against enemy ships and installations. As the war progressed, they became more involved in minelaying and air-sea rescue. Black painted Catalinas, the Black Cats, flew various special operations and the Cat remained a contributor to harassing raids over Japanese bases. Catalinas continued in RAAF service post-war, but by 1948 only No 11 Squadron still operated them, mainly in courier and search and rescue roles, The Catalina was withdrawn from Service in 1950,

(I had the distinct privilege of being among the rest of my officer- course colleagues at Officer's Training School Rathmines in 1953 when in fact we had the last flight in a RAAF Catalina (PBY5-A). This aircraft had been kept serviceable and occasionally flown by the Commandant Wg Cdr Hugh Conaghan, who later lost his life in a night flying accident in a Meteor whilst on an exchange posting with the Royal Air Force).



The transport for which we were waiting to take us out to the aerodrome and, more particularly, to what would be our workplace for nearly 18 months, duly arrived, the erstwhile Jeep. (the word jeep by the way was from the U.S acronym for the vehicle G.P, General Purpose vehicle which it surely was). We set off on a journey that we would frequently be taking, at least for the next few months, as I will explain shortly. The distance would have been less than ten miles and was in fact along the main road (later highway) to Port Douglas and to Cooktown as well as the Daintree'.

It was quite a nice drive and only took a few minutes before a seeming out-in-the-country perspective came into view. The houses thinned out at about Aeroglen and nothing much more

in the way of houses came into view until after the airport and nearing the small town of Stratford the adjacent Barron River and Redlynch. On entering the airfield there were only a few buildings at that time. A rather large hangar which the recently formed Trans Australia Airlines (T.A.A) utilised and a small passenger terminal, the control tower and the Meteorological/AirRadio office made up the rest.

The hangar housed a number of D.C.A aeroplanes, one a DeHavilland Dragon DH84 which was the air ambulance whose registration was VH-AMB and two DH89's Dragon Rapides VH-UUO and VH-UVT. The latter were leased to the Allied Works Council (AWC) whose inspectors and airfield engineers would regularly visit the myriad war-time airfields either still in operation or on a care-taker basis to the north and north west of Cairns.

Our work-place, the RAAF Meteorological office was manned by a number of RAAF Meteorological Observers led by a Flt Sgt Frank Ella and three or four junior NCO's. The tower was manned by 3 civilian air traffic controllers, Norm Burge i/c, Brian Wells both long-time DCA controllers. The third, whose name escapes me, was a demobbed RAAF bomber pilot. The air-radio shack was manned by two radio operators (not Morse trained) and they provided the Radio link with the immediate Cairns area and with stations as far south as Rockhampton and Mackay and North to Cooktown. There was a very strong liaison between the Tower operators, the Met. fellows and the Radio operators. We four PMG lads felt quite privileged for the quick assimilation and bonding that came with the team.

Another interesting part of our being located within one of the nerve centres was the rubbing shoulders with visiting pilots, service, civilian and airline, each of whom would have to visit our office as part of their flight planning. There were some quite colourful identities and interludes from time to time. One that comes to mind at this particular stage in my story concerned the air ambulance VH-AMB which was piloted on a 6 weeks rotational basis by TAA pilots (plus, if I remember correctly, some of the then embryo Bush Pilots group).

On this occasion the ambulance had taxied out just after the morning TAA flight had arrived and had discharged its passengers, one of whom was the area Air Radio Inspector from DCA on a routine inspection. He had come straight up to the tower as part of his inspection duties, checking on procedures and currency of air radio documents etc. He had just entered the tower, where I had also just arrived with the latest weather details for the tower operator, when the ambulance was boring down the runway, piloted by one of the wags, although brilliant, of the then TAA pilot retinue, (many recently discharged from the RAAF). His name was Kenny Macklin and he was proceeding out on an air-test of the DH84. He was just about airborne when he gave a belated permission to take-off call which went something like this:-

Cairns tower from Aunty Mary's Bum (AMB) permission to take off please, OVER.

The air radio inspector on hearing this and which should have more correctly made as follows:- Cairns tower from Victor How Able Mike Baker (the then phonetic code) may I have clearance for take-off please OVER? (and to add insult to injury the request should have been made before the aircraft started to roll not when it was virtually airborne,).

Norm Burge, the duty Controller, although used to Kenny Macklin's occasional flippancy on the R/T, was about to make a response when the Inspector took the microphone from him and to the Air Ambulance queried:-

Able Mike Baker, this is Cairns tower with the DCA Area Inspector of Airadio speaking, advise if

your current mission is urgent OVER, Kenny, then realising that flippancy was no longer flavour of the month replied:- Cairns Tower from Able Mike Baker, negative OVER.

The Inspector replied: Able Mike Baker, you are to return to the airfield and report to the tower when the correct R/T manner will be discussed further OVER. Kenny replied, without embellishments: Roger wilco. OVER and OUT. (He had been known on occasions when flying Rapl'd UVT to call it as Uncle Very Tired.).

I did have the good fortune to fly in both the ambulance and the two Rapides on quite a number of occasions. In the former when on an air test or in the latter on AWC trips to Cooktown, Karumba, Iron Range etc, each flight being over some of the most fascinating and, in many cases desolate, country, in Australia.



Pictured above:- a DH 84 (left) together with a DH89, the latter had the nicer lines of the two. There was also a DH86. very similar to the 89 but with 4 engines which the RAAF used as an air ambulance.

The Met office and the Airadio shack shared a common recreation area at the rear of the former. It was equipped with a wash basin, tables and chairs and a kitchenette. The area also held our Morse code equipment which was in the process of being installed by the PMG. We also had the use of a Kingsley AR7 radio receiver on which, from time, we received weather reports by MCW signal. This being a beep beep rather than a clack clack sound.

At this stage there was still only Chas and I. We had already discussed the likely shift arrangements and agreed, subject to no dissent from the other two when they arrived, that our six hour shifts should start at 0600, with change-overs at 1200, 1800 and 2359 hours. Having made ourselves known to the rest of the team we made our way back to Cairns and proceeded to settle-in.

Graeme Coker arrived a few days later, followed by the chap from Adelal'd whose Christian name was Reg and whose surname I think was Payne. We soon got into the routine of each shift with the sending and receiving of weather forecasts. The sending was mainly a re-transmit affair but in addition there were the observations made six-hourly by the RAAF Met chaps and which provided the Cairns local weather to the rest of Australia.(Our busiest Morse time was from 0300-0600 each day).

The day shifts probably required about two hours of actual Morse work in the six hour shift, the time in between was taken up with watching visiting aircraft, very few civil, but lots of RAAF, US, RAF and even Dutch movements.

One day, an unexpected US Air Force Mitchell bomber came over low and joined the circuit and landed, then proceeded to taxi and come to a stop at a point adjacent to the tower. The engines were left running, the pilot emerged in his smart uniform but with the added embellishment of cowboy boots, a six gun on his waist and a stetson, complete with cigar and a casual swagger. I happened to be in the tower at the time and noted from his shoulder insignia that he was a Major. He bounded up the stairs two at a time and greeted us with:- [\(Back\)](#)



Hell man, what's the name of this place, where are we?

Norm Burge replied, *This is the Cairns airfield, where are you from and where are you bound?*

I expected him to say Texas to the first question, but he quickly replied, *we left Cloncurry this morning bound for Brisbayne (is the way he pronounced it,).*

Norm, said *well I'll get out our maps and then work out a course for you Major.*

To which the Major quickly rejoined, *Hell no, we don't need any goddamn course, please just point and we'll be on our dontootin way.*

Norm pointed south, the Major exited the tower, rejoined his aeroplane and within minutes was heading south at a quite low altitude. We never heard from him again, or from anyone else who may have been looking for them.

Within a week of our arrival in Cairns it seemed to us as if we were part of the place, both at our domicile and at our workplace. As you can imagine I was straining at the bit for a closer look and a rld in a Catalina, however, I bided my time and waited for an opportunity. Charlie and the other two did not appear all that keen.

What I might not have to wait for though was an opportunity to learn to fly? I couldn't believe my luck, when the first day I was at work out at the drome, I noticed a Tiger Moth that appeared to taxi out of the mangroves on the northern approaches to the airfield. (The thought immediately crossed my mind: one of these days when I join the Air Force, I am going to learn to fly a Tiger Moth).

The aerodrome had been formed from swampland back in 1927, by a Mr Tom McDonald, about whom I will say more later. Suffice to say at this stage, that the airfield boundaries were mangroves and there was a Tiger Moth home amidst some of them.



One of these days I'm going to fly a Tiger Moth in the Air Force. [\(Back\)](#)

I had to rein in my enthusiasm. For all I knew it was a privately owned Tiger Moth and so soon after the war there were probably not too many flying schools about the place as yet. However, I was determined to find out more about this little aeroplane and I knew that Norm Burge in the tower would know, as he gets involved in every aircraft movement on the field. Norm happened to be in the tower that day, so I bounded up the stairs to his office in the sky three and not two, at a time.

On questioning Norm, he soon told me that it was one of two Tiger Moths and there was a Gypsy Moth too. All three belonged to a local garage owner, Bob Bolton, who had only recently formed The Cairns Flying School. He also said that it was just about to get under way. The only Instructor is a Charlie Gattenby who has just been appointed to the job and will run the School. Norm then said, keep an eye on the Tiger, it is going up for an air-test. When it comes back, wander down to its parking area which is in a cleared part of the mangroves. There's a gravel taxi-way leading to the School's bit of the drome. Charlie is a hell of a nice bloke and he'll be pleased to tell you all the School, flying lesson charges etc.

I could not curb my excitement and I never did let that little aeroplane out of my sight either.

As predicted by Norm, the Tiger Moth, arrived back after about twenty minutes and I made my way down to the area indicated and arrived there just as Charlie was getting out of the cockpit. He had another chap in the aeroplane with him who was climbing out of the rear cockpit. I later learned that he was a Buster Noble, a roustabout for the School, with not enough money to learn to fly himself, however there were opportunities for him to pay in kind.

Charlie was indeed a most pleasant man. Greeted me warmly and when he knew I wanted to learn to fly he said that I would not need to queue up as things were looking pretty slow. He said the rates were five pounds an hour. To put that into perspective, I was earning about three

pounds per week. (The thought crossed my mind that no wonder things were slow). After a bit more conversation Charlie then said that before committing myself too much I should first have a familiarisation ride which he could arrange for ten bob (ten shillings or \$1).

I then realised that I should settle down in the new job first and then pick a time that would fit in with my shift work. Charlie said that early morning and late afternoon was the time to fly light aeroplanes in the tropics. They jumped about a bit during the heat of the day.

He gave me his phone number at home (no phone at the School yet) and suggested I ring him as soon as I had worked out a day and a time. In the meantime I also found out that he had been an aviation pioneer, (he was probably about 40 at the time). He had flown the first autogyro, the original helicopter, in Australia in 1934 and had spent some years flying Fokker tri-motors into Wau for the gold mining industry in New Guinea. He had also flown some of Reg Ansett's aeroplanes during the war, on the blood run when they had been taken over by the Australian Government. I had little doubt that I was in good hands.

It only took me a few days to organise a schedule for lessons. A further advantage was that, during our short time in Sydney, I had been able to save about forty pounds from my Capital city allowance. So I had enough for the first eight hours of flying lessons.

In the event, the famil flight was fantastic. It lasted about twenty minutes and I had hands on for most of it. Charlie was impressed with my natural handling skills, I then told him about my Link Trainer experience which explained what must have seemed to him to be some above average adeptness with the handling of the joy stick.

Charlie did indicate to me, that whilst the initial training should not be too much of a pressure pack, it was better to have follow-up lessons over a relative short period rather than stretch it out too much. I explained that I had the ready and could manage three or four flights of 30 minutes each week, at least until I soloed anyway. I guess with all ab-initio flying training, regardless of the type of training aeroplane, once the in-air handling procedures are coming reasonably intuitive the landings and take-offs become the predominant feature of flying training.

Three weeks later, just before Christmas 1945 and following some one hour lessons and lots of circuits and bumps I was into my 6 and a half hour, when after one circuit, Charlie hopped out of the front cockpit, with the joy stick in his hand and said, I think you are ready to give this caper a try on your own.

I wanted to hop out too, although I had been handling things progressively reasonably well, I did not think it would happen quite so soon. I must confess now, fifty nine years later when one wouldn't be expected to remember much about one's first solo, I couldn't even remember it then either, even three minutes after I had landed, but I did feel pleased with myself. Charlie looked pleased too and hurried to make it a photo opportunity. I then started to really believe at last, that my ambition to be a pilot might come to fruition.

Following my going solo just before Christmas in 1945, two factors emerged which affected the continuing impetus of my learning to fly.

The first and what I could see as something of a stumbling block, was the financial commitment

necessary to continue with reasonable frequency, my lessons; leading to greater proficiency and licence progression. Particularly DCA endorsements e.g instrument ratings multi-engine skills etc. The latter was not really an issue for me anyway. Even had my finances not been a problem, licence endorsements embraced various flying hour minimums and I was not really gearing-up to become a commercial pilot. My plan was still to have a career in the RAAF and hopefully as a pilot.



Going Solo. [\(Back\)](#)

Had I been commercially-bent It would have taken a mint of money to acquire the flying hours which would anyway match those available among the veritable hundreds and hundreds of ex-RAAF pilots then loose in the community. And, of whom, only a quite small percentage would be sought/required by the civil aviation/airline industries anyway.

In the case of an air force flying career, RAAF pilots with whom I was again closely involved, together with ex-RAAF pilots who I was constantly rubbing shoulders at that time, were wise counsellors to which one should take heed. Each asserted that Flying School/Club pilots would still be required to go back to basics to meet RAAF procedural training programmes regardless of how many flying hours they had accrued.

I soon concluded that regardless of anything else, the cost per hour was still very much a limiting factor with my current flying programme. However, what was equally certain was my determination to continue. Flying was something I had always wanted and which I knew I would continue to enjoy for every minute that I was able to afford, particularly as the opportunities were right on my very door step. Charlie Gattenby had too, right from the start, been most supportive towards my love of flying. He endorsed the advice that I had received. He reassured me that the RAAF would be the only way to go once they started their post-war pilot training. In this regard, he continued youth was very much on my side and this coupled with a natural adeptness should all be in your favour when the time comes. In the meantime, he said, relax and enjoy (or afford) it,

So with this philosophical bit out of the way, I will now continue to talk about the Cairns Flying School, thus dealing with it in full perspective before going on to the RAAF experiences that I shared with No 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight at their rather Utopian Club at the Cairns Inlet.

CAIRNS FLYING SCHOOL.

It did not take very long before the word spread concerning the Cairns Flying School. Frustrated youths of about my age, who had hoped to get into the RAAF, learn to fly and go to war and who had a few bob in their pocket, began lining up at the hangar door (or where the door would have been had we had a hangar). Some, the sons of reasonably wealthy Italian cane farmers, from as far away as Innisfail, would come to Cairns for the weekend and do two or three instructional trips at a time.

A second instructor was appointed, an ex-Flight Lieutenant Neville Mitchell who, not by choice, had spent most of the War at Point Cook teaching literally hundreds of RAAF trainee pilots. This latter fact created some early human relations problems during the first weeks of his instructional sessions at the Flying School. It took me to bring these problems to the light of day.

As I had not flown with any-one else, Charlie Gattenby thought it appropriate that I do a check r'l'd or two with Neville. I had no problem with this and Charlie arranged it for my next period a few days later. Neville was in the front cockpit and as part of his pre take-off briefing I was to fly the aeroplane and he would make checks as required. So off we went on an early morning sortie. The procedure was a climb to 1500 feet to a local flying area. We were not under Air Traffic Control in those days as radio equipment was not fitted. All we would get from the tower and then only when in line-of-sight range, was a green' (or "red) aldis-style lamp, with their universal meanings of go/don't go.

I was a bit apprehensive, knowing the high standards to which Neville would have been accustomed with his RAAF system. I was trying to relax, when he suddenly shouted at me through the gosport, (a rubber tube connected to and from both cockpits to a head-phone affair in each pilot's leather helmet) pick-up your bloody wings, you're supposed to be flying bloody straight and bloody level.

I hardly had time to do that when he shouted again: what about your bloody nose, it's supposed to be bloody well on the bloody horizon.

Over-correcting the little Tiger, due to my anguish (and an absence of the accustomed please Laddys that I would be getting from Charlie Gattenby) he then, still roaring and shouting came out with: do they only have bloody horses, where you bloody come from, you bloody ham-fisted bloody lummox.

With that I roared back at him with equal anger: I'm handing over control, take me back to the drome. A second or so of silence, when he then rebutted:- you don't hand over until I tell you to.

Silence from me and the aeroplane started to drop its nose and one wing, so he took over and indeed headed back to the drome. He tried to get me to communicate with him on the way back, but I was in no mood for small talk. I was, in fact, quite furious and had started to worry about my continuing relationships with the Cairns Flying School and a likely big dent in my flying aspirations. When we landed he was still inclined to be aggressive towards me but before he had gone too far I said, Neville, you're not at Point Cook now, neither are you a Flight Lieutenant any more, neither am I one of your snotty-nosed RAAF trainees- (as I'd heard was a

popular description of many aircrew trainees), I continued by saying I'm not paying five pounds an hour to have you rant and rave at me, I'll stick with Charlie Gattenby from now on and thank you for nothing. A look of realisation quickly came on his face, in fact he was starting to look quite ashamed. He then said, Teddy you are quite right, you were unlucky enough to be my first ride with a civilian student, the last student I had was at Point Cook and, for reasons which we won't go into now, there really wasn't much time for pleasantries in the hot kitchen-like atmosphere of a RAAF Elementary Basic Flying Training School.

He then apologised, became a different man and we were soon the firmest of friends and flew together often.



Neville Mitchell and I became good friends and flew together often. [\(Back\)](#)

I mentioned earlier, our drive up to Cairns and Port Douglas in 1991. Well we decided while in Cairns that I should make a nostalgic trip out to the 'drome (as we used to call it and now of course, an International airport). On making enquiries about a still-in-being CFS I was directed to virtually the same spot which long-since had hard-standings, taxiways and a hangar in which there were several Tiger Moths, (*but no VH-AQQ.*). The owner himself was there, a man of about 55? I told him my story and by coincidence, he said Neville Mitchell had also trained him at CFS. Neville was still instructing when he came back some years later, also to instruct and which led to his eventual of buying the business. He said Neville still lived locally, 80 now. I was unsuccessful in contacting him. The owner then quickly offered to take me for a flip which I had to decline because of time constraints. So, instead, he said he'd take my photo with one of the dear old Tigerschmitts. I then told him about an earlier, 1945, photo (*I'll be a RAAF Pilot yet?*). He rejoined this with a heh, it's high-time that we did an update. So it was out with the camera snap – we have the pic below.



With the 1945 Christmas celebrations over (including my almost permanent celebration of going solo) and with the first year of Peace 1946, well under way, so too was the activity at the Cairns Flying School. Even had I an inexhaustible source of funds, I would have needed to join a very long queue for regular flying training.

A 1991 update of 1945 ([Back](#))

An Organisations and Methods honcho would not have taken too long to determine that we needed more aeroplanes and more instructors. However, neither of these were likely in the foreseeable equation for the owner of the outfit, so we had to make do with our lot.

In the meantime and back to the Telegraphy front, the four of us were finding the working every day of the week, albeit only for six hours per shift, was becoming something of a drag. The main difficulty being that we were not getting a free 24 hour day to follow other pursuits.

After a few weeks, I put on my O.I.C hat and suggested to the other three, that we could easily work 24 hours on and 72 off. There was plenty of room in the staff room to set up a folding bed, a kitchen was already in situ plus every chance of at least six to eight hours sleep during the 24 hour shift; it looked a goer. After a week's trial we were all for maintaining the new system and, without a word to Bessie (the Post Master in town), it became a permanent arrangement for the rest of our stay. It certainly gave each of us lots of opportunities to do other things.

Now having said this, back to the comings and goings of the burgeoning Cairns Flying School, particularly the next bit which concerns very much, the Innisfail students.

As foreshadowed earlier, the main interest was in fact coming from the lads from Innisfail. Of course with each one reaching their solo flight, there became an even more constant demand by them to fly solo sorties, which in itself created a back-log with the dual instruction programmes. It had to be addressed quite quickly and Charlie and Neville sat down over a quiet Coke and soon came up with a well reasoned and brilliant idea as so often happens after a glass of coke.

Why not overcome the latter problem with the taking of Mohammed to the Mountain i.e fly the aeroplanes down to Innisfail at week- ends, when one aeroplane could be utilised for solo flying and the other two for normal dual instruction. (The Cairns students seemed happy enough to take their regular dose of instruction, early mornings or evenings on week days). This system worked really well for me, as I became the third ferry pilot. We'd fly the three aeroplanes down to Innisfail early on Saturday morning and back late Sunday afternoon. About 45 minutes each way and this was a 90 minute flying that I snaffled buck-shee. Moreover, we stayed in the Innisfail Hotel (on the South Johnston River) overnight and this too was at no cost to the 3 pilots, or perhaps I should say 2 and a half me being still very much the novice. By the same token I had an appetite and a half at dinner time on Saturday night and at breakfast next morning.

We utilised as an operating airfield, a relatively large obstacle-free and fenced paddock with a corrugated iron-roofed car-port type structure in one corner. During these times, although the serious business of flying training was never ignored or jeopardised, there was none-the-less a picnic-like atmosphere to these weekends.

Also something that really came in handy was the standard side-slip landing which was the customary method with light aircraft in those days. Having lined up for the landing and to reduce height and speed fairly rapidly, the nose was kicked out of wind and the aeroplane put into a side-slip attitude which was corrected quickly in the last stages of the approach. Among other things it did make for a short- field landing, necessary at Innisfail as the field was not all that big. The aim was to touch down as close to the inside of the boundary fence as possible, thus maximising landing room, (and also reducing taxiing to our air conditioned hangar).

As we had no telephone communications, or radio, at the Innisfail field and as all the students rode bikes to the field, we had no transport into town after the days flying. Tied in with that, we also did not know when the programme would finish and therefore the time for a taxi? So our method for ordering a taxi was not only ingenious but also provided another freebee for me. My only occupation for the day, was assisting with the flying programme remaining up to speed, some ground handling of aircraft including refuelling, (plus the occasional cleaning out of a cockpit on days when turbulence engendered flatulence and other stomach-type evacuations were inevitable with some of the greener students). As there were no opportunities for me to fly, Charlie appointed me as the airborne taxi-orderer, which simply involved me taking off on the last and shortest, flight for the day, buzzing the main street of Innisfail in which the taxi rank was situated and, at the same time pumping the throttle gently. The induced changed note to the Gypsy major engine would then tell the taxi driver that we were ready to come into town. Why the very presence of a low flying aeroplane over the main street would not give the anointed message I will never know but I didn't question it, I wanted the flight.

I also enjoyed the return trip on a Sunday afternoon, when the other two would play follow the leader down on the deck and I would watch from above at the safer height of 1500 feet. Some evenings the flight was made all the more spectacular (and bumpier) with the heat rising from presence of the many cane fires that had just been lit.

So enough of the antics and activities of the Cairns Flying School at this stage of the narrative. We will rejoin them again, here and there later on.

Time now for a little about the doings of No 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight, their role being almost self-explanatory. The air being the medium of operation for such activities and the sea quite often the medium for the actual rescue, whether it be downed aircraft/pilots (pretty rare) or the more common seaborne vessel in strife or even lost.

As noted earlier, we had six to eight Catalinas at any time. The major problem was a shortage of aircrews. This being the result of the rather, hurried and massive de-mobilisation going on with all three services. Air-crews were just as keen to be de-mobbed as anyone else, except of course, those who had opted to remain on in the permanent air force, many of whom were rejected anyway.

This latter process resulted in a rather sad story as far as the embryo permanent air force was concerned. Historians have written elsewhere that the RAAF lost a huge number of highly

experienced and well-motivated aircrew because the selection process and staff were overwhelmed with the numbers involved and the inordinate lack of staff for a more careful scrutiny and selection of the best available. In the event and propitiously, tasks for No 114 ASR were not all that numerous and a watch and programme was maintained for their search and rescue role when required.

My first rld in a Catalina was, as earlier foreshadowed, the result of an opportunity. Charlie Jones and I had been to the pictures in the Cairns theatre which ended at about 11 p.m., On reaching the Barracks we noted that lights were still on in the Officers/Sergeants Mess and thought that a cup of coffee might be on the cards. We were surprised to see on our entry to the Mess that the Sergeant of Police was present as too were the duty crew the C O Flt Lt Nobby Clarke and numerous others.

We gathered that a Mission Launch outbound from Merauke had gone missing and the air force had been asked to mount a search. A long flight was involved in getting on station, then of course the length of the search would depend on when (and if) we found the launch. On such exercises the more mark one eye-balls on the job the better. Knowing this and not being on shift for another two days, I put my hand up to go as supernumerary crew and to exercise my eye-balls at the appropriate time. The C.O had welcomed the four of us when we arrived on the scene a few weeks earlier and had got to know us reasonably well. He was aware of my hell-bent endeavours to become a pilot and I believe would have thought, that my motivation would be in the right place. He agreed to me being part of the exercise, as an extra bod and put me in the care of a WOFF Toohey, whom I had met before, for all the necessary briefing.

An estimated time of departure for this Search was set at 0130 hours. Although this was only a short two hours hence, the flying boat did not need much to get it ready. One Catalina was always equipped with all the appropriate varieties of rescue gear, fuel, provisions, maps and charts etc. It was usually just a matter of, flight planning, crew provisioning and then getting airborne.

There was always a duty work-boat crew on call for the to-ing and fro-ing of flying-boat personnel. Entering or leaving was through one or other of the blisters on each side of the rear section of the fuselage. (These blisters had also served as gun turret positions when offensive action was required during WWII).

The aircraft was also equipped with bunks to facilitate crew rest and relief on the not unusual 20, 24 hour flights. A galley was also provided where hot meals could be prepared during flight. The flight engineer position was in the rather unique position of the wing-pod (or saddle) on which the mainplane was affixed to the fuselage. Although cramped it had windows on either side providing good visibility and reducing some of the otherwise claustrophobic effect.

Flying Boat pilots along with the normal skills associated with flying an aeroplane, also need considerable skills as a seaman, particularly in relation to tides, winds and sea-states. Each of these three components having an effect on the maintaining of direction whilst on the water.

Start-up was a unique procedure in itself. Anchors such as on boats would not be as effective due to the wing area and the resultant drag on the aircraft's hull. Steering with the aircraft's rudder was virtually useless on the water until considerable way was being made through engine power. A crewman was always positioned in the nose during start-up. I seem to

remember that the port engine was started first and until such time as the other engine was started the aircraft would circle the mooring buoy. The mooring crewman would unhook the aircraft from the mooring as soon as the second engine started. Dexterity and speed of the crewman were necessary otherwise the aircraft was likely to run- over the mooring.

The pilot then relied on engine and rudder power for turning on the water. Once taxiing speed increased from a few knots, steering with the use of the tail rudder gradually became effective as engine power was increased. In strong winds, tides and currents, further steering assistance was available from the blister section when crewmen, answering to an appropriate number of blasts on the aircraft siren, would deploy down and up a sea-anchor (water drogue) at the pilots command.

Now all of the foregoing was not learnt by me during WOFF (Noel) Toohey's briefing session. It took me some weeks and a subsequent number of trips to get this gen. Also and quite often, on future flights, I assisted with the deploying and re-shipping of the blister drogues.

I thought that all the above at this stage, to be useful for readers to understand some of the peculiarities of flying boat handling, when slowly moving on the water.

Noel Toohey (a Wireless Operator) while busy getting his own act together was gracious and helpful to me in explaining what personal bits and pieces I should take (a minimum I might add) and what clothing would be suitable. Once aboard I was able to sit adjacent to him at the aircraft's radio station. Fortunately it was a bright moonlight night and I was able to see a little of the outside world (mainly water). Moreover I was extremely excited.

We were airborne sharp on 0130 with about a seven to eight hour flight before arriving at the starting point of our square search area in waters off Papua. Once dawn broke I assisted with the preparation/serving of breakfast, (there were eight of us). Until we were on station I was free to rove around the aeroplane, I made myself conversant with, what the others, including the two pilots, were doing. The Navigator's charts and plotting equipment were quite fascinating. I also watched Noel put out the aerial which trailed immediately through a rear panel for this purpose.

This aerial would trail for some considerable distance behind the aircraft and assisted greatly with working distant stations. Not home base though, except during freakish conditions or when back in range.

Once the search started, I was banished to the blister where two others were already on the alert with the mark one eyeballs focussed for searching duties. In the event, from the time we started search from abeam Merauke until a point in time, which I think was six hours, we saw nothing but water. It was only when we got close to home some hours later, that we were given the news over the radio that the launch had turned up about four hours after we took off. With today's radio technology we would have been advised much sooner and our flight would have been much shorter. As it was, we started to see the lights of Cairns at around midnight and we were after 23 hours airborne, safely on the water taxiing up to our mooring.

The best way I could describe the landing sensation of a flying boat touching down was that it sounded as if we were alighting on a gravel road.

I had many flights after this and became quite proficient with working the radio and learning the various R/T procedures. Also when-ever one of the pilots needed a relief break, they would invite me to take his place and even let me hold the wheel which was attached to the controls on a yoke instead of a joystick. Another incredible thing was that a lot of the instrumentation was affixed to the yoke making it quite heavy. The throttles were mounted on the ceiling above the pilots.

A sight to really see for the first time, was a take-off in a heavy sea (even in a smooth sea, for the first 100 yards or so, the bow-wave of the aircraft blew back over the windscreen and for a second or two, visibility out the front was zilch). A heavy sea take-off usually had both pilots hanging on to the yoke like grim death, with the hull bang, banging as it hit each wave. Then when up on the step i.e the nose well up off the water's surface, it was not so unusual for the aircraft to bounce into the air for a moment or two and then, rather frighteningly, when first experienced, squash down again onto the next wave, with both pilots still exerting considerable backward pressure on the yoke until the hull cleared the water. During the initial part of the climb, which was generally quite gradual, the wing floats would be retracted up to their wing-tip position thus providing for cleaner surfaces for smoother and drag free flight.

Speaking of difficulty in becoming unstuck from the water surface during take-off in rough water, reminds me of an occasion when a Catalina had difficulty taking off from the Cairns Inlet in the reverse conditions of glassy smooth water.

One late afternoon, when all our Cats were resting quietly at their moorings, we heard the rather sweet sound of some purring Pratt and Whitneys which surely must be coming from a Cat-bird? A few of us were in the mess having a thirst-quenching glass after a hard day in the beautiful tropics, when we heard this aeroplane. The sound was close and very much resembled one of our own on final approach. We strolled outside and lo and behold, it was a Cat alright but with Dutch markings.

The Duty Boat-crew, who were always on alert for their out-of-hours services, had already fired up their motor and were heading in the direction of a free buoy for the mooring of the visitor. We went back into the Mess concerned that our small ales might be getting warm and knowing that it would be some half an hour or so before the Dutch crew came ashore. Which they duly did and, being late in the day with none of the normal operational/administrative facilities being open for business they were directed to the Mess for some introductions, some refreshments and accommodation.

The first thing we noticed is that they were all NCO.s, not uncommon in the Dutch Air Force and being part of the Colonial system which was still hanging on, in the Dutch East Indies, they, as we expected spoke perfect English. It did not take them long to tell us that they were on their way to Rathmines for some major servicing, with no planned intention to land at Cairns. However, when just abeam of our Base, they noted an electrical problem, which may have needed early attention. The Skipper had been in and out of Cairns a year or two earlier and knew his way around so, rather than take chances, decided to put down at our establishment.

Arrangements were then made for the malfunction to be attended to next morning. In the meantime, we enjoyed another ale or two following by a very pleasant dinner where stories of various aviation/maritime flavours abounded. Being somewhat of outsiders in this gathering, although wearing khaki like the others (except for badges of rank etc), the three of us, (the

other was working), did not attempt to explain our role in the establishment. We just sat back and listened, with the utterance of an appropriate Ooohh and Ahhh, or a laugh or gasp where necessary. The first thing was the aeroplane itself. Our boat crew had recognised it as originally being an RAAF flying boat. If for no other reason than it still had A24 stencilled on its hull and which was the RAAF aircraft identification number for their Catalinas. We also learned that the hull of the aircraft was showing its age and would be subject to extensive repairs.

Next morning, the electrical fault was detected, repaired and by noon all was in readiness for a departure for points south and Rathmines.

As they were about to embark on the work boat, the Skipper said for us not to worry if their lift-off took little longer than usual. He said that temporary repairs had been made to the hull before they left by screeding on to the inner surface several thin layers of concrete. As mentioned, about glassy surfaces, at the start of this story the old Dutch Cat started-up and headed east into what slight breeze there was, but on a completely calm sea, with spray fluming behind and with not much sign of step lift,

After some minutes, with the Dutch A24 getting smaller and smaller as it approached the Eastern horizon, one of the Engine Fitters, a Sergeant Col Mahoney, exclaimed:- if she doesn't come unstuck soon, we'll have to go out to Green Island and re-fuel her, that cement bonding of the hull must weigh a few tons, (Green Island is located about 25 miles from Cairns). Then, when she was just about out of sight, we could see her lift gradually above the horizon and slowly disappear. It seemed to me that three cheers would not have been inappropriate.

It may be of interest with the mentioning of the name Col Mahoney, he and quite a few others that I met whilst at Cairns, Flt Lt Keith Kennington a Pilot, Flg Off Frank Rout also Pilot, W.Off Paddy Duncan a Warrant Officer Disciplinary (WOD), Sgt Colin Anson (better known as Avro) also a (second) Pilot and an LAC Lee Bourke a Radio Technician, were people from 114 ASR that I met up with again later on after I joined the Air Force.

Frank Rout and I played football together in Ballarat in 1948. We were both in the Ballarat team, which at that time was coached by Percy Hunt an ex-Geelong footballer. Keith Kennington retired to the Gold Coast, where I met up with him at a Catalina Association Reunion in Tweed Heads. He died in the late '80's. Paddy Duncan turned up again as the WOD at Laverton where I was doing my rookies course in 1947. He left me in no doubt as to the fact, that previous friendships would cut no ice now that I was a rookie. As far as he was concerned, our relationship back in Cairns was finito.

I remember one day on rookies when on Morning Parade, where Paddy read out the notices for the day and also handed out punishments from yesterday, he quite often called for volunteers for this and that. He enquired: are there any golfers among you lot Thinking that I might get out of a bit of the morning drill session, I immediately put up my hand. He then said: righto AC1 Ilton, report to the Barracks Store collect a mop and bucket and go and clean out those 18 holes(pointing to a nearby latrine).

Sgt Anson, was subsequently commissioned and I ran into him again at Laverton in 1953 by which time he was a Flight Lieutenant and was the OIC of Test and Ferry Flight at No 1 Aircraft Depot. He and a navigator, Flg Off Ted Bloomfield, had the task of ferrying aircraft from all parts of Australia for major servicing at No 1 AD. One day it might be a Canberra, another day

a Dakota, even a Bristol Freighter was one of their tasks.

Col Mahoney and I were on the same commissioning course at Rathmines in 1953, he was a Warrant Officer by this time. Both my wife Mattee and I saw quite a lot of him and his wife Joy over the years. He eventually made Air Commodore rank and retired to the Gold Coast where he passed away in 1997. Joy is still living on the Coast. Lee Bourke, was commissioned at about the same time as me and retired as a Group Captain and he and his wife Helen moved to the Gold Coast in 1982. He passed away in 1998 and Helen, like Joy Mahoney, is still on the Coast.

I must say that I did enjoy so much being able to mix with these people again following our time together and in a quite different situation to that at 114 A.S.R. (even with Paddy Duncan.).

A few months went by, during which time, as I mentioned, I did get in quite a few trips, some short and some long. on the dear old Cat- boats. Had I been keeping a log I guess the hours involved would have totalled up to 200. It was becoming obvious though that the Cairns A.S.R. commitment was running down. Total crews diminished to about six and aircraft to about four. It was during this time, it was decided that, as part of the run-down, we four could move out to the Transmitting Station, opposite the aerodrome, where there was now suitable accommodation. This was in the form of an old Queensland colonial house which had, at the start of WWII, been commandeered by the Australian Government, who in their wisdom, considered a house would make suitable camouflage for a Transmitting Station (despite the large number of aerials sticking out?).

This accommodation had not been an earlier option due to a house full sign at the time. However, the run-down had also included Transmitter technicians, so four extra beds became available, into which we promptly moved.

It was quite a happy arrangement, there were ten of us in total with a Sgt Peter Blackburn i/c. Rations were sent out to us, each alternate day from Kuranda Barracks and we each took turns to cook. (This was where I learned that a leg of lamb stayed pink, not because it had not been cooking long enough but because, in my case, it was a pumped (corned) leg that would stay pink no matter how long it was cooked. I had never heard of corned lamb).

After some months with these living arrangements, the RAAF then decided that the existing Flying Boats would be withdrawn to Rathmines and would be replaced by PBY5-A amphibians. These aircraft would then operate from the Cairns airfield rather than from, as had been the case, the Cairns Inlet. This plan was subsequently changed with the whole ASR operation being re-located to Townsville at the RAAF's Garbutt field.

Despite all of this movement, our task at the Meteorological Office at the Cairns aerodrome was to continue until further notice. However and along with the other closures, the Transmitters were also closed down, so we were moved into town to be domiciled at The Pacific Hotel situated right opposite the Kuranda Barracks. The wheel had come a full circle and whilst the prospect of staying in what was in those days one of THE hotels in town, the down-side was that we lost our transportation and were issued with a bike to ride to and from work.

What I was pleased about though was my being back in town in time to have a last ride in the Catalina in which I had my first and a subsequent number of flights. I seem to recall her radio

call-sign as being Oboe Zebra Fox.

Before we moved into the Pacific Hotel, I had been introduced to a Mr Vince Vlassoff by Col Mahoney. Vince was a fisherman and often took Col fishing out on the reef. I remember Col putting Vince up for honorary membership of the Sergeants Mess because of the frequency that he would present the Mess with a heap of fresh reef fish. Vince is probably better known for his development of the pier-side aquarium out at Green Island which we visited on the occasions when a RAAF Crash boat was visiting the island.



At the Mooring, Cairns (ole faithful, Oboe Zebra Fox)

In referring once again to our later (1991) trip to Cairns, we did make sure that Green Island was on our itinerary as a once again for me and as a first for my wife Mattee. On the way over on the launch, I enquired from the skipper whether Vince Vlassoff was still about the place. I told him of my friendship of 45 years earlier with Vince and wondered how his health had fared over the intervening period? He replied, he continued to live a full life until his death only a few weeks ago. I was saddened by this having almost had the good fortune to see him once again.

During, what turned out to be our last few months in Cairns, late 1946 and with the RAAF's departure to Townsville, the time I had spent making a nuisance of myself around Catalinas, was now able to be spent by being a similar nuisance around the flying school.

My flying training had not become any more frequent, less if anything, as the cash flow had not been given any injections of any kind. Even my free rides to Innisfail had dried up, due to other students using this ferry flight as paid solo flying, however, there was a new interest which began just before Christmas and continued until our departure in March 1947.

I mentioned Tommy McDonald in an earlier part of this narrative, who was famous for his early aviation pioneering in North Queensland and was instrumental in the founding of the Cairns airfield (in 1927). As well as his aviation interests, he was also the owner of a quite large jewellery store in Cairns, for which his main supplies came from a wholesale distributor in Melbourne.

Much to his dismay, during the early weeks of December (1946) a massive rail strike eventuated down South. I am not sure whether it was confined to Victoria or whether it was a National walkout, but what I am sure of is that Tommy McDonald's Christmas supplies seemed unlikely to reach his Jewellery shop in time for the normal Christmas shopping rush. At about this same time, Charlie Gattenby had made a parting of the ways with Bob Bolton and the Cairns Flying School and as a result, he was at a bit of a loose end with what to do with himself.

During an odd ale with Tommy, an aviator mate of long-standing and who also enjoyed the odd glass Charlie got to hear about Tommy's Christmas jewellery supply dilemma. Charlie was also aware that the Post-war Reconstruction Dept with its Disposals element, was conducting

massive surplus aircraft sales at various RAAF bases throughout Australia. He had in fact seen an advertisement in the Brisbane Courier Mail which was offering surplus Avro Ansons, I think at Laverton, for, I believe, two hundred pounds. A condition of sale being that they could only be flown once (to their destination) before major overhaul and the granting of a Department of Civil Aviation Airworthiness Certificate (C of A).

Charlie suggested that he fly down to Melbourne with TAA, negotiate a sale, fill the aeroplane up with Tommy's jewellery bits and pieces and have it all back at Cairns in plenty of time for the Christmas sales, Tommy jumped at this and also to Charlie's other suggestion, that they would then offer the Aggie to Bob Bolton and his flying school for conversion to air charter work which was a growing concern around North Queensland at that time.

The scheme worked like a charm. Charlie said all he had to do was hop in the old Aggie, stooge along at about 1500 feet as a precaution for any forced-landing emergency and follow the railway line all the way north to stay in touch with civilisation and communications. What's more he said, as soon as the plane is unloaded, Frank Mitchell (Neville's brother and aircraft engineer, who had joined Bob Bolton's School), would busy himself preparing the Aggie for a C of A and sale to Bob Bolton. This then, also became my new interest as Frank's labourer and off-time-spanner-holder, I was able to help nearly every day, on days off as well as at shift changes.

On assessing the conversion task, for C of A purposes, Frank Mitchell was pleased to note from the aircraft's log books, that Charlie had selected an Avro Anson which had flown very few hours. Thus, little work would need to be done on either the engines or the airframe, the main work being re-figuring the internal lay-out of the aeroplane to suit passenger carrying. Additionally, a paint job from the war-time colour scheme (see picture below), to the then popular silver external finish of most civilian aircraft.



Typical of an Avro Anson Aircraft Awaiting Disposal. ([Back](#))

It turned out to be an interesting although, finicky and laborious, conversion, although at the same time Frank Mitchell, was one in a million. A fantastic innovator and a craftsman with anything to which he turned his hand. Oddly enough, he never did have the same interest in flying aeroplanes as did his brother Neville.

The task of conversion was completed not long after I returned south. The C of A was issued and the sale effected to Bob Bolton. Unfortunately, not so long after this I believe the aircraft had an un-salvageable prang, with no doubt, disappointment and consternation on the part of the new owner as well as to Frank Mitchell. It was during these three months that I had, as it turned out, my last two solo flights. Both of them a little hairy and which could have ended up in disaster.

On the first occasion and unusually, I picked late afternoon to take a 3000 feet, 45 minute flight which took me south towards Innisfail, west up to the Atherton tablelands area then north to about Kuranda and again east back to the 'drome.

Being still very much the novice cross-country flyer and not yet having acquired the ingrained pilot-habit and indeed importance of a constant 360 degree surveillance, I had not noticed a band of low cloud coming in from the ocean until turning on to my final leg of the trip. Cairns and the airfield were now covered in cloud. Not yet experienced in instrument flying or letting down through cloud, I was quick to notice that the Barron River was still in my view out to my port side. I knew, from many previous landings from the North, that the river virtually bisected, within a few hundred metres, the northern threshold of the main run-way. So I quickly reduced height and lined up my nose on the Barron River maintaining an easterly track. I then fortunately and quite soon visually picked-up the main runway and landed safely without further ado. To say that my palms were a little sweaty was something of an understatement.

The next incident was only a week or so before my departure for Southern climes. This time it was a morning and last flight and from memory, my last 50 shillings for spending on dear old VH-AQQ. This half hour would be just enough to fly off the coast a little bit and take in the beauty of Green Island on the horizon and the rather spectacular ranges to the south of the Cairns Inlet. I would not have called the King my uncle; it was such a beautiful morning only me and my little plane moving relatively quietly through the morning air. I could not help but reflect on my time in Cairns and all the nice interesting places I had seen and things that I had done. Whilst disappointed that my flying experience was not as extensive as it might have been, I think I was quietly proud of at least having got this far. It had whet my appetite for things for the future and particularly my remaining resolve and more than ever, to join the Royal Australian Air Force as soon as possible after arriving back in Melbourne. Anyway, enough of this musing and back to the flying incident about which you are waiting to read.

On take-off, the early morning breeze was from the North making the main (and sealed) runway the duty runway at that time. There were two other runways, but not sealed like the main. Their surface was gravel. On returning over the drome I noted the wind indicator, a large flat and white wooden construction which from the air looked something like an aircraft on the ground, had a rudder like a plane and turned with the wind. A glance at this gave a relatively accurate wind direction and thus selection of runway for landing.

A further glance at the airfield wind-sock, also a take-off and landing aid, gave an impression of the wind strength, i.e. stretched out taut a strong wind, limp and hanging down then a 'breeze only or no wind at all. (Remember we had no radio in those days for asking the tower for landing instructions, surface winds and QNH's (the Q signal of the times seeking barometric pressure).

I estimated that the wind was now closer to NE/SW than the SE when I took off. As I'd not had,

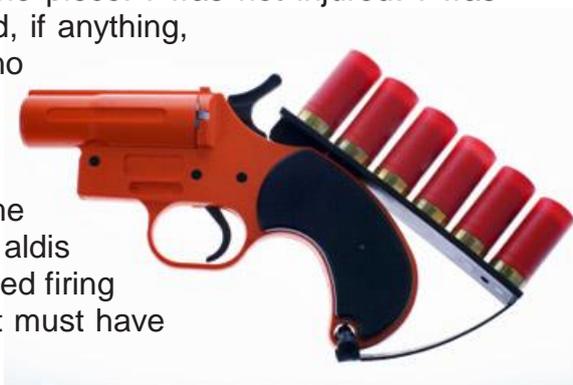
at this time, (as with not having had instrument flying instructions), cross-wind landing lessons, I chose the runway closest to wind direction, which was one of the gravel variety. I commenced a let-down circuit accordingly. It was about 9.30 am and the day had begun to warm-up. This was noticeable as I approached the threshold and crossed the southern extremity of the main N/S (bituminous) runway, which having been exposed to the hot sun for some hours created ground effect turbulence. This created an unexpected and immediate ballooning effect on the little Tiger with the net result I lost my heading and by the time I had re-adjusted my line-up the remainder of the runway was looking quite short. So discretion being the better part of valour, I opened the throttle and went around again (as I'd been dutifully taught.).

I was ready for the turbulence at this time. but being on a standard gliding approach, with not a lot of speed, I still could not manage the corrective control that was necessary. So round again I went, glancing ruefully at the little glass tube sticking up out of the petrol tank in the top wing to see how my fuel was going? (there had been enough when I took off for at least an hour or more flying). I was a bit shocked to see that the fuel state was getting low.

Panic was settling in, plus the age-old law of survival must have been quite apparent in my body language (not that anyone was looking, except as I learned afterwards a rather concerned Air Traffic Controller in the tower). During my second go-around I started to, a bit more scientifically, assess the situation. Reasoning that if I made a powered approach, I would clear the ground effect of the main runway threshold much quicker and probably manage to keep a reasonably straight approach line on to the gravel runway?

So at the appropriate time, down went the nose, hand stayed on the throttle and instead of rounding out at about the normal 65 knots I was probably doing closer to 90. What's more, instead of the customary three point landing with tail skid touching at the same time as the main wheels, I did a wheelie. The dramatic effect of this being when I started the normal ruddering to keep the little beast straight on the imaginary centre line on the rather narrow gravel runway, I ground-looped didn't I?

Actually ground looped into the swampy ground on the edge of the runway. The aeroplane finished up in the mud facing the other way but in one piece. I was not injured. I was sitting there in my straps, feeling shaken, relieved and, if anything, also embarrassed when, out of the corner of my (no doubt blood-shot) eye, I saw a Qantas DC-3 landing on the main runway in much the same direction as me. I later learned the reason for the Air Traffic Controller's excitement, was the DC3 being in the same circuit. This had prompted the flashing to me of red aldis lights from the tower and when I ignored these he started firing reds from a Verrey Light pistol, none of which I saw. It must have looked like the start of WWII. ([Back](#))



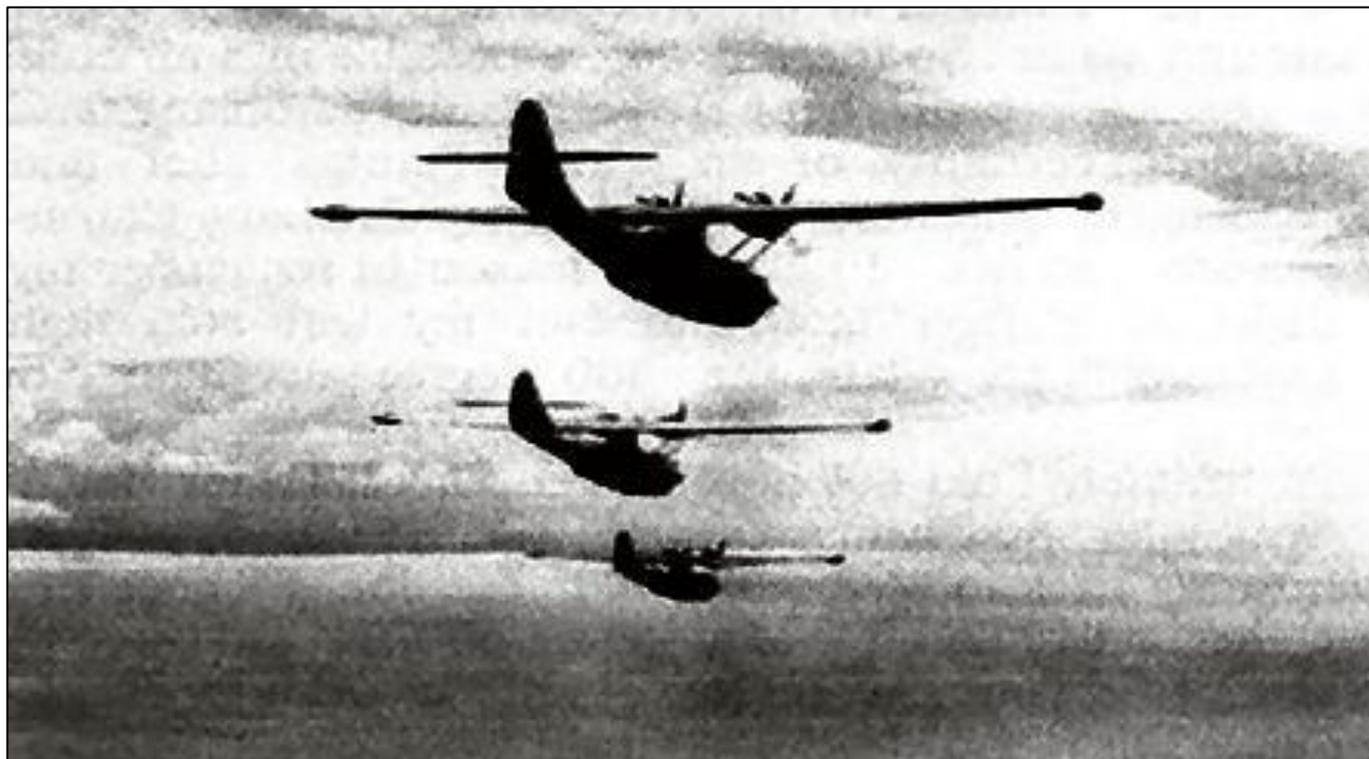
The irony of it all was each time the Qantas pilot lined up to land, I snuck in underneath him, forcing him to go around again. So there it was, a possible mid-air collision, a possible badly bent Ted and his aeroplane and the absolute certainty of an irate Qantas pilot and his passengers who were on the Sunday Brisbane-Cairns-Port Moresby service. I have good reason to remember my last flight in a Tiger Moth, in fact my last solo flight in anything, (and again, remembering the 360 degree surveillance rule).

Fortunately I did not have to hang my head for long, as a week later, just before Easter 1947, I was on a TAA DC3 on my way back to Melbourne. Charlie Jones chose rail as he wanted to do a bit of stopping-off here and there on the way home. Graham and Reg did the same.

The picture with me and AQQ (right) was taken a few days before the ground-looping incident. I would like to think that the picture of the Catalinas below alludes to a fly-past in recognition of (the PMG's) contribution to the excellent weather reporting from Cairns, perhaps also, as a fitting fare-well to us. But this was not the case.



It is just a nice picture, a fitting finale, to the RAAF Cairns story and a picture that I like very much. [\(Back\)](#)



Catalinas Disappearing into the Sunset [\(Back\)](#)

MELBOURNE AND PMG RE-VISITED, APRIL 1947 - OCTOBER 1947 [\(Back\)](#)

In some ways there was a bit of an emptiness about my departure from Cairns.

All my RAAF friends were either now in Townsville or had been posted for demobilisation. Not having made, (nor needed to), any real contact with our PMG counterparts in Cairns and therefore where no significant rapport had been established, except with the Postmaster who was away at the time, there were no tears to be shed or glasses to be raised in that quarter.

On the other hand, there was a certain fullness during my reflections of the past sixteen months. Reflecting on all the interesting things that I had done, things that many 18 year olds would have given their left something to also have done. This did make me feel somewhat privileged and to give thanks rather than express any regrets, (which as Frankie says I had a few) about my presence in Cairns, the capital of North Queensland.

Probably, what was quite remarkable is that again, there had been no affairs of the heart, (no Roma's no Rae's). Reasons being I guess, our work place and domestic arrangements did not provl'd any opportunities at all for mingling with the ladies, a mingling which would usually lead to social occasions, and, in the normal course of events, would predictably lead to some heart flutterings and blood rushing (or disappointments and heart-breaks?)



An Aerial View of Melbourne (Looking East from Essendon Airport)

In a way, the life style I chose, that of being around aviation at every moment that I could, did not provide opportunities for romance anyway, unless you count my love affair with Oboe Zebra Fox and Able Queen Queen.

So it was that I stepped aboard an early morning TAA DC3 flight to Brisbane, landing, seemingly at every airport in between. I distinctly remember Townsville, Rockhampton. and Mackay and that the elapsed transit time to Brisbane was about seven or eight hours?

This was my first flight in an airliner so I was well pumped-up and marvelled at the air-sickness

barley-sugar lollies that were handed out with gay abandon before every take-off and again before every landing. Not to mention the boxes of sandwiches, cups of tea or soft drink. (I don't think hard liquor was part of the trappings of those days except on International flights). Not that the absence of the stuff worried me unduly. I did have the occasional ale while in Cairns, cannot remember drinking spirits or wine. The ale was not hard to take. The Cairns beer, (brewed in Cairns), was described by most as pure as mother's milk (what memories of babyhood some of them had).

Mind you this was not the case where the same brew was supped away from Cairns. For some reason, which had the brewers tossed, their beer did not travel well, not that it was any cause for concern to them, because there were still a great many so-called war shortages, beer being one of them.

My flight eventually arrived in Brisbane, I believe the airport was at Archerfield in those days. Too late for a connecting flight to Melbourne so I stayed at the Salvo's Peoples Palace in Brisbane which to me was not unlike, in decor and architecture, the dear old Hotel Pacific in Cairns. The clientele however being more the battler type when compared with the likes of some of the would be if could be visitors up in Cairns. I must confess that each time I am in Brisbane now and when walking past this beautifully restored/maintained Peoples Palace on the Edward and Ann Street corner, I do think of that night in April 1947 and particularly the Plowman's (or Commercial Traveller's) style we had for breakfast.



I also remember the then convenience of an Airline Bus taking us out to the airport. This coupled with the sight of a big beautiful, four engined Douglas DC4 Skymaster really made my day. Only one stop today I was reminded by the Air Hostess, we will be in Sydney in about 3 hours, on the ground for about 45 minutes and then another 3 hours to Essendon. Compared to the DC3 it was tops. Little did I know though, that in four years' time, I would be making 2 trips to and from Japan, of 30 hours duration each way, also in a, Qantas this time, Skymaster. Even the most comfortable of aeroplanes becomes less comfortable when each leg of the flight takes ten hours or more.

As with my departure from Melbourne some eighteen months earlier there was not a lot of hype about my arrival back. No bands, or dancing girls, not even any rellies to welcome the prodigal

son. Dad was busy station-mastering' (now at Pakenham) and sister Joan was busy in her flat at Malvern, where she was now living with her de-mobbed sailor husband Don, mothering their two-year old daughter, little Cheryl.

The ubiquitous multi-coloured piece of coral that I brought with me as a presento was duly presented with accompanying ohhs and ahhs. I was shown my bed, which was the living-room sofa and which I knew was only a couple of nights until I found a suitable boarding house.

An ad in the Melbourne Age bore fruit a couple of days later and I moved into quite a nice place in St Vincent's Place Albert Park, (an actual street of beautiful old two storey Terrace Houses all of which had been converted into one form or other of boarding house, most with their lovely old iron-lace balustrading on the verandas being built-in, with canvas roller-blinds, to make that extra bed-room out- on-the-veranda). From all accounts all have since been restored to their former grandeur and now have Monopoly money price-tags.

I shared a room with two others, once again Public Servants too. I was hoping that Charlie Jones would come and join me on his return. In the meantime I met up with George Growcott again, who was still boarding at the same place in Cromwell Road South Yarra. Meeting up with him certainly set the scene for the next 6 weeks, a period which was determined by the fact that the PMG advised me that I had 6 weeks leave to take and that this would need to be done before I returned to work at the CTO.

I think with my earlier mention of George I did not indicate that he was one of three boys. His two brothers went to the war in the RAAF and his mother and father ran a General Store at Lindenow South (about half-way between Sale and Bairnsdale in Gippsland). Apparently, pre-war each of the boys helped out in the store after school and at weekends to give their parents a bit of a break. Because of the war, they'd not had a break of any kind for six years. George suggested I provide this break with my 6 weeks leave.

The idea appealed to me, regardless of me not knowing much about General Stores, the kind that ruled in country districts in those days that sold anything from a fish-hook to an odd sock. George said you'll pick it up in a week, then they can go on a five week trip somewhere.

And so it came to pass (as George would often quote being one for extracting biblical words seemingly out of the air) I headed down to Bairnsdale with him, in the train. He made the necessary introductions, showed me around the store, introduced me to his folks (lovely old couple), then to (55 year-old) Court who could neither read nor write, who when asked to bring in a case of Rosella tomato sauce, would respond by saying you mean Parrot-brand don't you boss?

Then the bombshell dropped, George advised that I had to drive the International Van out on the country rounds twice a week. (I did learn to drive up in Cairns but only around the airfield perimeters in the Flying School's dilapidated old ute. I didn't have a licence. George brushed this aside and muttered something about, you'll be able to fix this after I go back to Melbourne? When, he did go back to, a couple of days later. I was in charge.

Despite some apprehensions, I did also have the confidence of youth and perhaps some of the Aussie culture of she'll be right mate. Both Mr and Mrs Growcott showed me during the next few days, how to take the orders (for the Country Rounds) over the telephone, what order

books to use, (each customer had their own) and, as I was soon to find out, paid only when the time was ripe. Believe me it hadn't ripened in recent times. Of the 40 or so customers on each of the 2 rounds, there was a total outstanding amount of about 900 pounds (an average of about 12 pounds per customer, which in those days would have been about six months' supply of groceries). I said nothing to the Growcott's but made a mental reservation to try to correct that situation once having established a rapport with the customers who I would be visiting over the next few weeks.

I also learned how to cut the butter with a wire contraption. The butter came in a box in a large square slab and sat up on the counter suitably covered with assorted forms of insulation (no refrigeration in those days). A similar method was adopted with cutting of large and small, slabs of cheese. A small set of scales was handy on the counter, as everything in those days was delivered in bulk and kept in large bins either under or behind the counter. So a pound of this, a pound of that, half a pound of something else, all had to be individually weighed, then either wrapped in newspaper, white butcher's paper or simply placed into brown paper bags.



[\(Back\)](#)

I knew that I had arrived by Thursday when there was the ceremonial of pinning on of my badge of office, the apron. All grocers wore a sort of an apron, white calico, which was from waist to shoe level and held on with a large safety pin. Butchers, similarly except that they wore dark blue and white striped (the colour code ensuring that the blood stains from the meat chopped in your presence didn't show up so readily)

So by the end of the week I was ready to be the Master of Growcott's General Store except for the driving licence bit. Monday morning dawned with blue sky and ground larks chirping, maggies trilling and the odd moo of a cow came from a nearby dairy farm. I wondered what sort of mood the Sergeant of Police at the Lindenow Police station, about three miles distant, would be like. The law of the day (and still today) required that the person requiring the licence would be accompanied by a licensed driver, this I did not have as Mr Growcott had departed with friends the day before.

I wasn't too concerned about my driving skills, the Cairn's ute had been kind to me and the fact that I would be driving an International was a bit of a bonus, because my Tally lessons with Mappy Collins were still there in the back of my mind. So off I set on this beautiful Gippsland autumn morning, with dairy farms on one side of the road and seemingly sugar-beet farms in most of the paddocks on the other side. The rail-head was at Lindenow and some of the sugar beet trucks were already loading for their trip to the Station.

I arrived at the Police Station at about 8.30 parked the van right outside and nervously walked into the Station, apprehensively looking at the Wanted notices on the board on the veranda of the Police Station. Not necessarily for the Ned Kelly type but perhaps the Wanted for Unlicensed Driving type.

The Sergeant was quaffing, no doubt a cuppa, from a huge tea-stained enamel mug, he looked up, wiped his moustache and exclaimed; Gooday sonny and what brings you here (I didn't have

the nerve to say what I wanted to say, something like that bloody old van out there. Quickly as I could, I explained the Growcott holiday story, my role in that as a latter-day saviour and that I needed a licence. He shuffled a few papers on his desk, looked at the clock and then looked at the ceiling as if looking for inspiration and then walked to me. Not being accompanied by anybody, he then said where's your licensed driver, where's the van, not having looked out on the state of the day up until that point. I replied I was on my own and that the van was parked outside. He then said, well you must have driven it here alright, give me 5 bob and I'll give you a licence and you can go on about your good Samaritan business of grocerying..

I was quite relieved, but not surprised. Even today, some fifty odd years later, the local Police sergeant in a country town is still very much a human behaviouralist and administers the law with a good deal of common-sense.

In the event, the next five weeks just flew by, as most of the store's customers were out on the farm, there was not a lot of counter customer work. This gave plenty of time to take the phone orders and to get each of them ready for loading into the van on round days Tuesdays and Fridays. Old Court was a blessing in disguise and pretty much my helper.

I also managed to convince most of the customers that the time was ripe for bill paying and that I would be grateful if the debit could be reduced completely, or as near as, by the end of my five weeks. In the event, Mr and Mrs Growcott were highly delighted on their return to find the princely sum of 700 pounds in the safe. Moreover, it made the expense of their holiday seem rather insignificant. My reward, (which I had not been seeking, my 6 weeks break was enough), was a brand-new racing bike which was delivered to my Melbourne address a few days later.

I returned to Melbourne, to the CTO and to some new living arrangements, Charlie had arrived. George wanted to live with us again, so we moved to a quite nice bed-sitter in Acland Street St Kilda where breakfast and dinner were provided each day. It was a nice location, two minutes' walk from the beach. A quite good group of shops nearby and plenty of public transport, either by the St Kilda Road trams, or the rail to Flinders St from St Kilda.

[\(Back\)](#)

Charlie and I soon settled into the CTO routine with lots of shift work and quite busy days when at work. The telegram traffic was as heavy as ever. We were able again, through the shift-swapping system,

to work the same shifts. George, who was involved in country telephone installations, was only seen at weekends, however, quite often during jobs he would have a few week days off, many of which would fit in with our shifts, so we started playing golf out at Yarra Bend, a beautiful public course and only about a 30 minute bike ride from St Kilda.



Both Charlie and I were getting itchy feet me for the Air Force and which had still not started recruiting for Post-War aircrew. However, they were still busily demobbing RAAF people at

about the rate of 5,500 per week. In fact about that time, mid 1947, the peak of 180,000 odd of the war-time RAAF had been reduced to about 13,000, (I reasoned there was certainly room for little me.)

Charlie on the other hand, who had acquired quite a taste for Meteorology while in Cairns, was daily searching the Commonwealth Gazette for Meteorology jobs in, I think, the Department of Interior as it was in those days. He eventually had success, with a start in his new area of interest in the Public Service scheduled for about September/October 1947. Meanwhile I in turn, started getting some good vibes about the RAAF having kept pestering the RAAF Recruiting Officer at Kellow Fawkner House, in St Kilda Road, nearly every day of the week, either in person or on the telephone.

The most positive signs that he could give me, toward the end of August, were that the planned commencement date for aircrew training is likely to be early 1948. His suggestion to me was to join the Permanent Air Force, for which recruiting was in full swing and would get you on the ground floor for air-crew for which applications would soon be invited. I was giving the Recruiting Officer's advice considerable thought, when I received a telephone call to come in for further discussions. These discussions turned out to be on the basis of my being directly enlisted as a Telegraphist, subject to my passing the entry 'Trade Test. I would then, following a recruit training course at Laverton, be posted to Air and Ground Radio School at Ballarat for instructional duties, with the strong possibility of being granted acting Corporal rank soon after arrival.

All of this sounded pretty good to me, I wasn't worried about the Trade Test and the pay of a Corporal meant I'd be getting about an extra thirty shillings more per fortnight than I was receiving from the PMG. I formally notified the RAAF Recruiting people, in early September that subject to my passing the Trade Test for a RAAF Telegraphist and of course, passing my entry medical for the RAAF, I was ready to join the Permanent Air Force.

It was only a few days later that I was given a rail warrant to Laverton for the purpose of reporting to the Signals officer at RAAF Station Laverton, a Flight Lieutenant Oliver J Studley. An absolutely delightful person, who could not have made me feel more at home. He was in the pre-war RAAF and seemed to be almost part of the furniture at Laverton.

He gave me the Morse code receiving and sending test (the RAAF required speed for both being 22 wpm). It seemed strange to me to be reading a beeper instead of a sounder. I passed both without error. Then the typing test which I seem to remember was 40 wpm, which I also passed. I had no difficulties with the medical examination.

I sweated on the Postman for the next week or two, when finally on 4th October I received my call-up letter, which I still have after all of these years – a copy of which is on the following pages. So here I was, after waiting nearly 15 years, I was on my way to a career in the RAAF about which a lot more will be said in the rest of this book.

Form P.P. 78/35.
(Revised May, 1946)

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Royal Australian Air Force,
Recruiting Centre,

379 St Kilda Road,
Melbourne, 2/10/47

Mr. A. E. Ilton,

Dear Sir,

With reference to your recent application for admission to the Royal Australian Air Force requested that you report to the above address with your luggage at 3.30 a.m. on 27/10/47. for enlistment as a Telegraphist in Group 11., with the rank and pay of Aircraftman, Class 1.

Please bring with you the following (if applicable) :—

- (i) Birth Certificate or Extract of Birth Entry (if in your possession) ;
- (ii) Marriage Certificate;
- (iii) Birth Certificate of any children;
- (iv) Naturalisation papers;
- (v) Militia, Army, or Naval discharge, clearance A.T.C. or V.D.C. (part or full time);
- (vi) Ration Book. (WARNING: Ration books must not be defaced. Non-current cards must not, under any circumstances, be detached. Non-compliance renders the holder liable for prosecution under National Security Regulations.)

The daily pay applicable to your mustering is 13/6. per day. Dependants' allowances for the wife and children of a member are as follows:—

Wife	1st Child	2nd Child	3rd & each subsequent
4/6 per day	3/- per day which includes domestic allowance of 1/- per day	2/- per day	1/6 per day

The payment of the dependant's allowance is subject to the airman making an allotment of at least 3/6 per day. Recruiting centre is to be advised immediately if married since submitting application.

All airmen are provided with free messing and accommodation, or allowances in lieu. Uniform and necessaries are also provided at Departmental expense. The full scale of uniform, however, must be issued immediately on enlistment.

*Rail warrant is enclosed herewith to enable you to report to W11 and should you not avail yourself of this offer, it is requested that you advise me immediately, return the warrant at the same time.

*Meal warrant/warrants is/are enclosed which will enable you to obtain meal/meals on your journey. These warrants must not be tendered to private cafes or restaurants, but only to Messing Rooms under Railway control.

Ration books must be surrendered on enlistment.

Yours faithfully,

(Back)

CONDITIONS GOVERNING ENLISTMENT, PROMOTION, RE-MUSTER, TRANSFER AND DISCHARGE

Candidates must make themselves familiar with the following information:—

1. The rates of pay and allowances and deferred pay for airmen, particularly the group in which enlistment is made.

2. On enlistment, airmen become subject to the Air Force Act and Air Force Regulations as amended from time to time and Orders promulgated under the authority of that Act and the said Regulations.

3. Enlistment will be for the ~~duration of the war and 12 months thereafter~~ duration of the war and 12 months thereafter.

4. Enlistment is for service anywhere, and no guarantee can be given as to location at any time, but the wishes of personnel will be considered as far as the exigencies of the Service permit. Airmen must be prepared to serve overseas or in Australia.

5. Promotion to higher ranks, re-muster to other trades, and transfer to other units, are governed by the following factors:—

(a) the requirements of the Service;

(b) the existence of vacancies;

(c) the special qualifications of an airman for holding any position other than that to which he has been appointed.

6. Promotion, re-muster, or transfer is always by selection and cannot be claimed as a right by any airman.

7. Re-muster to another trade is subject to the applicant having passed the prescribed trade test, and subject to vacancies occurring in approved establishments.

8. The passing of a trade test for re-muster does not entitle the airman to immediate re-muster; promotion is always governed by the conditions set out in paragraphs 5, 6, and 7 above.

9. An airman may be discharged at any time and for any of the reasons laid down in Air Force Regulations, or re-allotted under the Defence Act to another service.

10. When applicable, an airman's fare is paid from his place of residence to his place of enlistment.

11. If an airman after enlistment desires to change the location of his household, the cost of removal of furniture from his place of residence to his place of enlistment or to any place of subsequent posting must be borne by the airman. No portion of this expense is payable by the Department.

Airmen receive free medical and prescribed free dental treatment. Their wives and children will receive free medical or dental attention.



MY RAAF POSTINGS. 27TH OCTOBER 1947 TO 30TH APRIL 1976 ([Back](#))

RAAF Station Laverton Vic.
(Recruit Course)

Air & Ground Radio School Ballarat Vic.
(Telegraphy Instructor & Orderly Room Sergeant)

391 Base Squadron Iwakuni Japan. with attachments to 77 Squadron Korea.
(Telegraphy Duties)

Officers Training School Rathmines NSW
(Commissioning Course)

RAAF School of Technical Training Wagga Wagga NSW
(Engineering Officer Course)

Air & Ground Radio School Ballarat Vic.
(Radio Officers Course)

NO 1 Aircraft Depot Laverton.
(Radio Officer)

Radio Apprentice School Frognall Melbourne Vic.
(Adjutant)

Maintenance Command HQ Albert Park Melbourne Vic
(Staff Officer, Organisation)

RAAF Headquarters Victoria Barracks Melbourne Vic.
(Personnel Staff Officer)

Department of Air Russell Officers Canberra ACT.
(Personnel Staff Officer, Airmen)

Base Squadron Butterworth Malaya.
(Administrative Officer)

RAAF ACADEMY Point Cook Vic.
(Administrative Officer)

Officers Training School Point Cook Vic
(Air Force Law Instructor)

No 1 Central Reserve Kingswood NSW.

(Senior Administrative Officer)

RAAF Staff College Fairbairn ACT.

(Command and Staff Officer Course)

Department of Defence, Air Force Office Canberra ACT.

(Personnel Staff Officer, Officers)

RAAF Base East Sale Vic.

(Administrative Staff Officer & Commanding Officer Headquarters Unit)

Base Squadron Air Base Butterworth Malaysia.

(Senior Administrative Officer)

Air Base Headquarters Butterworth Malaysia.

(Administrative Staff Officer & Commanding Officer HQ Unit)

Headquarters Support Command Victoria Barracks Vic.

(Staff Officer Publications)

Headquarters Support Command Vic.

(No 21 Industrial Mobilisation Course)

RECRUIT TRAINING LAVERTON, (27TH OCTOBER 1947, 10TH MARCH 1948)
[\(Back\)](#)

The big moment had arrived- all I had to do now was to pack my worldly possessions from my sister Joan's and get myself down to the rendezvous point. I must say and on reflection, as a twenty-year old at that time, who had been something of a Nomad with not too many spare coins, and with whom there'd been little or no financial assistance from the home front, (neither, I might add, had it been requested), I would not have really gathered together that many bits and pieces. Two battered old suit-cases as we called them in Victoria, or ports (portmanteaus) by our friends in the northern states, were able to accommodate the lot.

In accordance with the Joining Instructions I duly presented myself, along with quite a number of other young, (some old), men at the St Kilda Road Recruiting office at the appointed hour of 8.30 a.m on 27th October 1947. We were conveyed to Laverton in what was referred to, as in the RAAF parlance of the day, a Tender - a 3 ton truck with canvas sides and top complete with quite basic seating down either side of this enclosed area.

Some of my fellow travellers I had seen on the several occasions when attending the Recruiting office. Most of us were naturally apprehensive, except for a couple who were re-enlisting after having served in the RAAF during WWII. Once we were settled down at Laverton, among the 27 of us I gathered were two pilots, two W.A.G's and two ground staff. This was confirmed when they first appeared in full uniform with wings and WWII campaign ribbons.

[\(Back\)](#)

The average age of the rest of us would have been between 18 to 20. Most of us, it could be argued, were without a lot of worldly ken at that stage, but this was soon to change.

Our first point of reference once arriving at Laverton was the personnel TD&R Section, (Transit, Demobilisation and Recruit). Then the paper-work began. The bit with the hand on the holy book took place very early in the piece. No doubt in case there was any early changes of heart (although there was an out clause if exercised within three months of enlistment date). Next was the quick pre-luncheon trip to the Clothing Store, to which, from then on wherever one served, the only name given this supply facility would be L-Group. All equipment in the RAAF had alphabetic prefixes to the Identification number. So items of clothing had an L prefix, items of furniture Q, etc etc).

We were given an initial issue of a pair of bloocher boots, a pair of air force blue overalls, (goonskins, long-sleeved and buttoned to the neck, the only ones who looked good in them were WAAAF's with cute little rears) and a navy blue beret. A quick detour, (everything was quick during that period in our Service lives, including quick marching commands), was made to our living quarters, a WWII galvanised iron huts with comfortable accommodation for about 30. We were here allotted, in alphabetical order, our bed-space. A quick change followed into our and in most cases ill-fitting, overalls and boots.

Then, rather bedraggled and by this time chastened, lot, we were marched by someone who seemed to have the power of God and who they called a Drill Instructor. Which reminds me that I haven't indulged in an aside for a page or two, so I here I go with one about Drill Instructors.



Some years later, (1954), when returning to Laverton (as a Pilot Officer) I had occasion to make, what I thought was going to be a social visit to the then, National Service Training Unit Headquarters where the Commanding Officer was a Squadron Leader (Chick) Champion. The same card-playing Chick of our Laverton days in the early 30's (he was then a Cpl). I reckoned there was a uniqueness in such a reunion, so thought I'd pop around and have a chat with him about those early and memorable times. However, I did have the presence of mind, (being an Officer Training School graduate and now big on couth and culture) to make an appointment.

Duly summoned into the august presence I saluted and said, I am Teddy Ilton sir, you used to play cards with my Mum and Dad at the Railway house in Laverton back in 1934. Not really expecting him to leap out of his chair and race around the table to embrace me, but I did at least expect some sort of remark such as it being something of a small world. Not Squadron Leader Champion, whose only short and staccato response was, is there anything else to which, although taken-aback, I could only meekly respond, No thank you sir.

Bidding me a stilted good morning then he pointing me to the door, to which I quickly marched, although crestfallen, (and tail- between-legs) to the outside world.

It was at this point that I was reminded of my first experience with Drill Instructors when on rookies in 1948. I spotted a water colour painting, quite large and nicely framed, in the passage-way outside the CO's door. The painting, brilliantly illustrated and coloured, portrayed a large Bull whose tail was in a half-elevated position immediately above a patch of discoloured green grass on which was an obvious and steaming pile of excrement, The painting had, particularly to me at the time, a simple and descriptive caption.

The Birth of a Drill Instructor.

I think I could have been forgiven if perhaps, I had at the time, although a little uncharitably, added the extra words:

and a Squadron Leader too.

Now back to our march to the Mess for lunch. No doubt we were all hungry but nonetheless our praise for the good quality food was warranted and gave us hopes of more good things to come.

These goods things firstly started with the same type of bed that we had on our first couple of nights when with the RAAF in Cairns ie a Cyclone-wire gate with folding legs and palliases stuffed with straw. We were then subjected to a rather personal physical inspection as part of our introductory health and cleanliness programme, then the inevitable inoculations where it is was not unusual to see grown men cry or, as in this instance faint.

The daily metering out of salutary punishments by the WOD, Paddy Duncan, who I mentioned earlier, was not met with any real enthusiasm. Penalties for not shaving as close as one should, having the blanket roll out-of-square by one 32nd of an inch, not being able to see one's face in the required shine of one's boots and even worse, lying one's.303 rifle down on the wrong side, usually meant punishments of:

- doubling around the parade ground,
- a morning in the Queen Mary (the pot washing tub in the Officer's Mess kitchen) or
- stoppages of leave.

All of this of course was part of the self-discipline phase of a Recruit course.

The one thing that this routine did produce and without a shadow of a doubt was, the close bonding that we 27 rookies shared. A bonding even closer than that perhaps required of the Syllabus of Training for Air Force recruits. The endless hours of drill, both foot and rifle, the small arms instruction, lectures on the History of the RAAF and the Air Force penal code were even harder to take due to the extremely hot and early summer weather at Laverton.

The huts in tin city were not the most habitable accommodation that we had ever encountered, but and fortunately, after two to three weeks when it was considered our bonding was maturing, so we were re-located to the two-storied wooden barrack blocks adjacent to the then Airmen's Mess, where, if I remember correctly, we were two to a room.

We were introduced to panic nights, these being scheduled for every Monday night when

everyone panicked into ensuring that every inch of one's quarters was bright and shiny in readiness for the weekly Commanding Officer's inspection. This usually followed the CO's weekly parade ground ceremony in which the Recruit Course also took part and for which nothing short of being Grenadier Guardsmen was acceptable.

We spent a lot of time marching around the roads of RAAF Station Laverton, as well as on the gravel of the Parade Ground at the Recruit Training Unit. During some of these stints, I was able to take in some of the familiar sights from my earlier time at Laverton. The Geelong Road no longer weaved its way through the RAAF property. It now went straight on and followed the railway line. Quite a number of extra houses had been built since the few that were there when we left in 1934.

The airfield, despite it being two years on since the end of the war, was still seemingly cluttered with surplus war planes. There were dozens of Beaufighters and still quite a lot of Ansons awaiting the disposal sales.

I found it a little dis-arming on the rather frequent occasions when we had to spend some time at the T.D.&R Headquarters, which also housed the Pay and Accounting Section the boss of which at the time was my Flight Lieutenant, Uncle Bill, Hardy. He would give me a smile, a nod and an encouraging wink when he saw me. (I also served with him a few years later in Japan).

There wasn't a great deal of variety with our daily activities other than that necessary to cover all aspects of the Syllabus, however there was certainly one rather major activity which I think is worthy of recording for posterity in this narrative. It concerned our Recruit Course being detailed to become part of a 100 man Guard of Honour for the visit of the then Chief of the Air Staff, CAS, (now called Chief of Air Force (CAF)), Air Marshal Sir George Jones (right). We only had about three weeks remaining before Graduation and our drill was considered ripe for Ceremony.

Flt Lt Eric Canny, Station Adjutant (and a pre-war W.Off), was the Orderly Officer, whose duties in those days included marshalling Guards of Honour for VIP visitors etc. On this occasion he was in charge of a Guard just inside the main gate, charged with providing appropriate compliments to the CAS who was visiting for the purpose of opening the first post-war Inter service Sports (March 48).

Unbeknown to Eric on the day in question, (and to us guardsman too of course, who weren't too fussed about the whole deal anyway,) an RAF Air Vice-Marshal who had been visiting Australia (semi- informally) was catching his RAF Hastings aircraft at Laverton to return to the UK. In fact was retiring from the RAF on his return to the old Dart.

Eric spotted his approaching RAF Estate Car, (I think they were called), in [\(Back\)](#) blue-grey livery and with an aura of importance about it.



Then noting when the car came closer, the high ranker in the back seat, decided we'd better bung this bloke one and abruptly called us to attention and a General Salute. Unexpectedly,

particularly to Eric who knew CAS was only two minutes away, the RAF car screeched to a halt and the said AVM fully booted and spurred hopped out, returned our salute and said to Eric, I told the Station Commander that there were to be no formalities prior to my departure, but seeing he has chosen so graciously to send me off in this fine style I must at least say a few words to the lads in due acknowledgement and appreciation.

Not only did he say a few words but he told Eric he would inspect the Guard. Eric, by this time, was wondering how he could handle a pommy AVM and a RAAF CAS at the same time. As can be imagined all we rookies were loving every minute of Eric's discomfort. Unbelievably as CAS's big, black, and shiny Humber Super Snipe came into sight abeam the Laverton Railway Station, the AVM was still saying his thank-you's to poor old Eric who by this time was almost epileptic.

We, on the other hand, were silently wetting ourselves with the ticklishness of the situation and the expected re-writing of Guards-of-Honour protocol. As the AVM drove away feeling rather delighted about Service traditions still being alive and well even in the RAAF; the CAS himself, in all his splendour drove through the gate, deferentially accepting Eric's and our honours and then hopped out with swords dangling and golden-edged peak cap glinting in the mid-morning sun of the western suburbs. He did a repeat of the AVM with some very nice words to Eric and a stroll through the ranks, taking time as I recollect, to chat to quite a number of his Guardsmen.

When it was all over, it seemed to be poetic justice to us that two senior Air Force officers had been given honours to which in any circumstance they were entitled. On the one hand the RAF officer had not expected it. On the other hand Sir George was, of course, expecting it and to his credit did not just return the salute and drive through.

When I became more senior in the service and was then (and sadly) made aware of the rather serious differences that had existed between Sir George and some of his subordinate senior RAAF officers of the time, my mind went back to this day in 1947 at Laverton and how he treated members of the Guard of Honour as being something special.

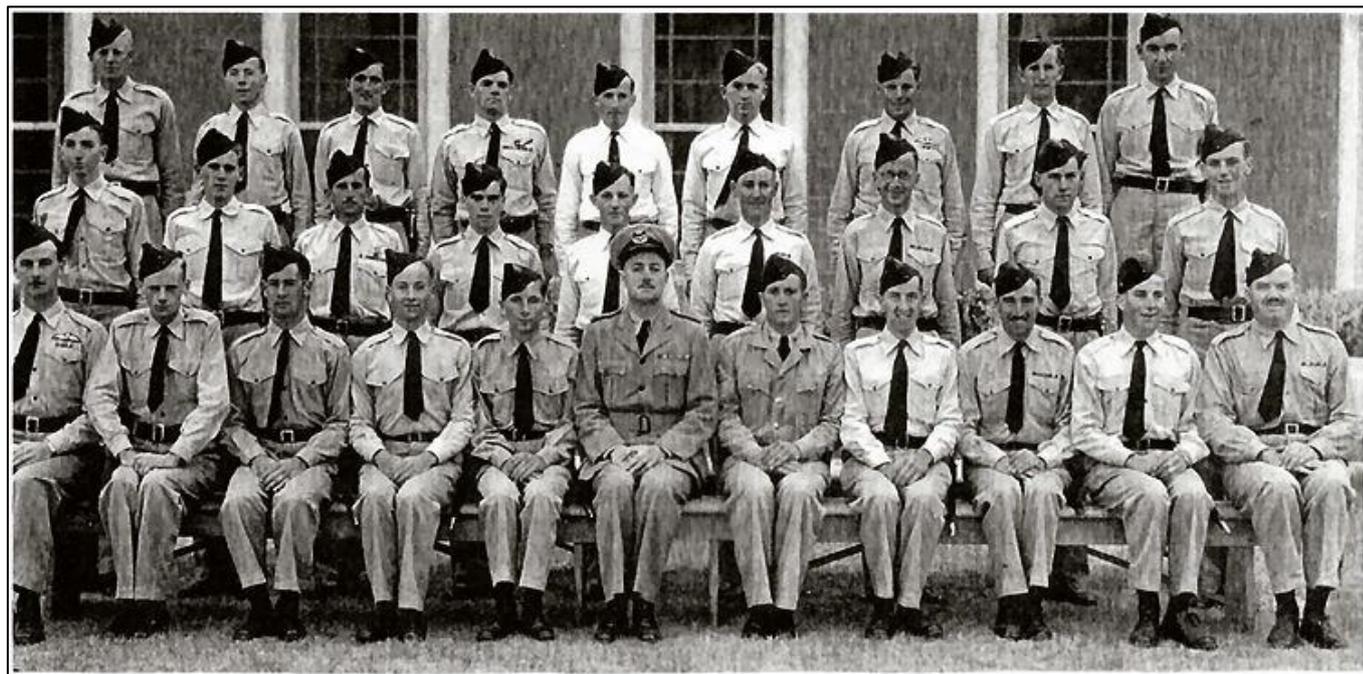
As a footnote, as far as Flight Lieutenant Eric Canny was concerned, there were no particular laurels for him to pick-up, given the quick initiative that he displayed in the close encounter of an Air Marshal kind. Eric, like many pre-war Warrant Officers, who had been commissioned during the war, (some reached Squadron Leader rank and possibly some Wing Commander) were given as the Permanent Air Force was being formed the Hobson's-Choice option of remaining in the RAAF with their pre-war rank of Warrant Officer or being discharged. The remaining three weeks of our Recruit Course really flew by, those Course members who came in without a RAAF mustering, would soon be going off to the various training schools. Those, who like me, had enlisted through a Trade Test, were anxiously waiting to see to which RAAF Unit they would be posted. I already knew about Ballarat.

I had become quite friendly with Sel Williams, (one of the WWII Wireless Air Gunners on the course) who with a good academic background, had enlisted as an Education Assistant. We were both pleased when his posting to Ballarat came out and became staunch pals for many succeeding years. Whilst still at that stage, just in my 20's and not yet much of a man-of-the-world, the Recruit course left me with a feeling of how camaraderie can blossom amongst a group who through close contact and harmony soon became team achievers. The

encouragement of self-discipline development was also a Course strength. Given my earlier exposure to the privileges of the Sergeants Mess both at West Sale and again in Cairns, this made it even more of a character building exercise for me. I had to be careful not to allow these experiences to cloud the values of learning curves and experience. Mind you, I am sure it also gave me an early insight into some of the characteristics of a Service culture and a better understanding for the successful development of a career.

Now looking at the Course photograph, (below), nearly sixty years later and although I did lose track of most of my Course mates, there were no particular notoriety or spectacular RAAF careers about which I am aware. Some, like me, were commissioned, others made senior NCO and Warrant Officer rank. Some did not renew their period of enlistment. Alan Pinches remustered to Air Crew as a Navigator and as such gained, not a sought-after-notoriety, in Vietnam when as a Flight Lieutenant and a member of a Canberra crew, his aircraft was hit by a SAM and he and his pilot, Wg Cdr John Downing successfully ejected and both were subsequently rescued.

**No 7 Permanent Air Force Recruit Course- (24th November 1947- 10th March 1948)
RAAF Station Laverton.
(Second course at Laverton)**



Back Row L-R: Harry Robertson, Ted Ilton, Max Conradi, Ian Wright, George Parnell, Allan Richardson, Arthur Mead, Johnny Morris, John Yuren.

Middle Row: Gus Comer, Stewart Lowe, Sel Williams, Allan Pinches, Ron Wilkinson, Ted Scholz, Ron Frost, Keith Bond, Con Horley.

Front Row L-R: John Ashcroft, Gil Macainsh, Dave Lovell, Herman Bilske, Ron Jenkins, Fit Lt C Eckert, FSgt N Winnett, Owen Thiele, Fred Knott, Ivan Voter, George Reynolds.

[\(Back\)](#)

THE BALLARAT YEARS. ([Back](#))

Preparations for my move to Ballarat were not without some drama. As Sel Williams and I were both heading for Ballarat and Sel, being married, was keen to acquire some accommodation in Ballarat as soon after arrival as possible. He did not have a car, neither did I, but the use of one would have been quite handy for both of us. As earlier reported, I still did not have that many chattels to take with me each time I moved but Sel had gathered together quite a lot of books during the three months we were at Laverton.

The few Leave weekends we had been getting while on Rookies, I spent with my sister and her husband Don, at their flat in Malvern. Don had an old (1927) Armstrong Siddley which he offered to lend me for a day to bring my stuff up from Laverton and Sel's as well.

The day dawned for the uplift we were heading down the Footscray-Geelong Road in a thick fog and nearly came to grief among a flock of sheep being driven to Market. The brakes on the car weren't too good, I finished up having to swerve to miss the sheep, (the after effects of this weren't felt until later in the day).



We loaded up the car at Laverton with our various bits and pieces and then first headed for Sel's place in South Yarra. We arrived there without any problems and unloaded Sel's gear. Whereupon he asked me if I would mind taking a pram up to the London Baby Carriage place in Carlton for repairs. Again, no problem and having duly deposited the pram at the LBC Coy and, on the way back, had just crossed Princes Bridge when the car gave a hell of a lurch then one of the rear wheels went bowling down past the YMCA, We, on the other hand, remained stuck with the immovable car in the middle of the St Kilda Road and South Melbourne tram-line junction. whereas chaos soon reigned supreme.

Within only a few minutes later, (about 3.30pm in the afternoon), trams were banked up as far back as the Melbourne Baths one way and then back to the Shrine the other, A quick examination of the wheel hub showed that the wheel studs had sheered off. The earlier near encounter with the woolly lambs at Footscray must have put too much strain on the all-of-20 year-old studs?

When the police came on the scene, they were threatening to charge me with not maintaining my vehicle properly. I immediately hastened to say, it's not my fault, the car belongs to my brother-in-law. This didn't really help matters much, however, within fifteen minutes or so, a tow truck arrived and towed us down to South Melbourne where the old Armstrong Siddley was left for running repairs. The trams then started to sort themselves out.

Prior to this happening, I had been tempted to ask my brother-in-law if I could borrow his car for a few days to take our gear up to Ballarat. This of course was now out of the question. I

proceeded with the original plan of training it to Ballarat, which I was booked to do the next day anyway.

Once again, my (latent) leadership qualities (??) must have been showing, because I was put in charge of troops once more. There were four others, unknown to me, also going on posting to Ballarat.

We arrived in Ballarat, just around lunch-time and I rang the camp from the station, requesting transport, only to be told that it was lunch-time and that we would have to wait for an hour or so.



Ballarat Railway station. ([Back](#))

Being young, growing and hungry lads, we made a bee-line for the local shops looking out for a Cafe and some lunch. We found such a place in Lydiard Street equipped with the popular built-in dining-cubicles of the day, each of which seated four. The place was fairly busy with one cubicle vacant, to which my charges headed and another in which was seated alone a very attractive and well-dressed young lady. What ho I thought, here's my chance to make up for the lost time of the last eighteen months or so, with perhaps an early conquest with one of the young Ballarat damsels? She must have read my mind, because as I moved to her cubicle she looked up, seemed to throw her head back, (lovely wavy black hair too), then took one look at me, quickly stood up, leaving behind half a cup of tea and a couple of ham sandwiches. She

hurried out of the cafe with nary a look back at me.

The Lydiard Street Tea Rooms. ([Back](#))

It crossed my mind that the natives weren't going to be friendly in Ballarat. Maybe it had become an anti-RAAF town because of the hundreds of RAAFies who'd been through the place during the war (The Wireless Air Gunnery School having been where the current Air and Ground Radio School was then operating).



So I sat down on my little own, ordered my lunch and while waiting, proceeded to eat the perfectly good sandwiches that the young lady had hurriedly left. Now at this stage, before going on any further with my particular doings at my first posting, it might be useful to recount a little of the history of, as it was and still is I think known, The Garden City. A few bits of history and background of the RAAF's presence in the Ballarat district is also quite pertinent to my story at this stage.

I should also say that a further lead-in to this phase of my story is that Ballarat, like so many things in one or other's lives, undoubtedly became the catalyst for the subsequent direction of my life. And the course of the lives of others with whom I came into contact. Ballarat therefore has a particularly special place for me and for this reason, the pages about it which follow will no doubt take up a considerable portion of this book.

I do hope it will be just as interesting to the reader. It did and still does, form a significantly important part of my life's journey. On occasions like this, that when one is putting one's story onto paper, the reflections on how one's life did unfold is indeed quite remarkable.

Two rather historical events (one civil, one military) that took place in Ballarat were the Eureka rebellion and the graduation of the first RAAF Radio Apprentice Course at RAAF Ballarat. The latter being a significant historical mile-stone for the post-war planning of the development of the Permanent Air Force.



The early City fathers of Ballarat created some memorial perpetuity of the gold-miner's rebellion by dedicating the land on which the skirmish took place, as the Eureka Stockade. It soon became known as the Stockade Park. Some well-planned landscaping was part of this exercise including a water feature, which at one time featured as a popular swimming and paddling area.

As far as the origins of Ballarat are concerned, the site for the township was selected in 1851 when the area seemingly all around the site was already pock-marked by the considerable gold-mining that began in 1850 and was still then a hive of activity.

Throughout the 1850's the miners underwent considerable hardships and privations. The primitive nature of camp-sites and their being ripe for disease, in many cases occasioned by water shortage, were primary ingredients for low morale of the miners. The cost of a Miners' Licence together with what must have been quite stringent inspection and questionably corrupt procedures, also created a fermenting for unrest.

Opposition to the licensing arrangements in particular grew. Refusals to pay the fees for a licence eventually resulted in a boil-over developing into the historical incident on 3rd December 1854. A pitched battle involving miners, police and military troops took place.

The incident, unique in Australian history, led directly to a reforming of the Goldfield Administration and became very much a political symbol for both the democratic and independent process in the fast developing Australia. Although the Gold Rush diminished during the next decade, the township of Ballarat continued to flourish to the stage where it was declared a city by 1870 as well as the hub of a wide-spread and wealthy district.

The population of Ballarat and district today (2011) is approximately 86,000. As well as the city being now steeped in early Australian (Gold Mining) history it is now the show-piece of magnificent parks and gardens. Reserves have been created, cathedrals and churches abound as too do primary, secondary and tertiary academic institutions. In addition to it being popular and well-known on each of the above accounts, Ballarat also has an almost national tag as being one of the coldest inland cities in the Commonwealth.

Now, in turning to some historical aspects of a RAAF presence in Ballarat, it can be said that the catalyst for same resulted from Australia's WWII commitments.

When Australia entered the war on September 3rd 1939 the personnel strength of the RAAF was 310 officers and 3,179 airmen, including about 900 aircrew, 450 of whom were in the UK and Middle East serving with the RAF. An Empire Air Training scheme was devised that spread an aircrew training programme through Empire related countries namely UK, New Zealand, Canada and Australia.

To meet the Australian-based commitment, 49 airfields plus their individual infrastructures, were concurrently erected. RAAF Ballarat was formed, its role being to provide the wireless training for the Wireless Air Gunner category.

So it was, on 29th April 1940, the first intake for No 1 Wireless Air Gunners courses commenced training which consisted of 4 weeks initial (rookies) training followed by 24 weeks wireless training, radio theory, D/F loops, radio practical and a minimum standard of 22 wpm receiving and sending of Morse code. Following another four weeks of gunnery training at a various Bombing and Air Gunnery Schools, they graduated as Sergeants on 11/6d (\$1.15) per day and then were drafted to the Middle East.

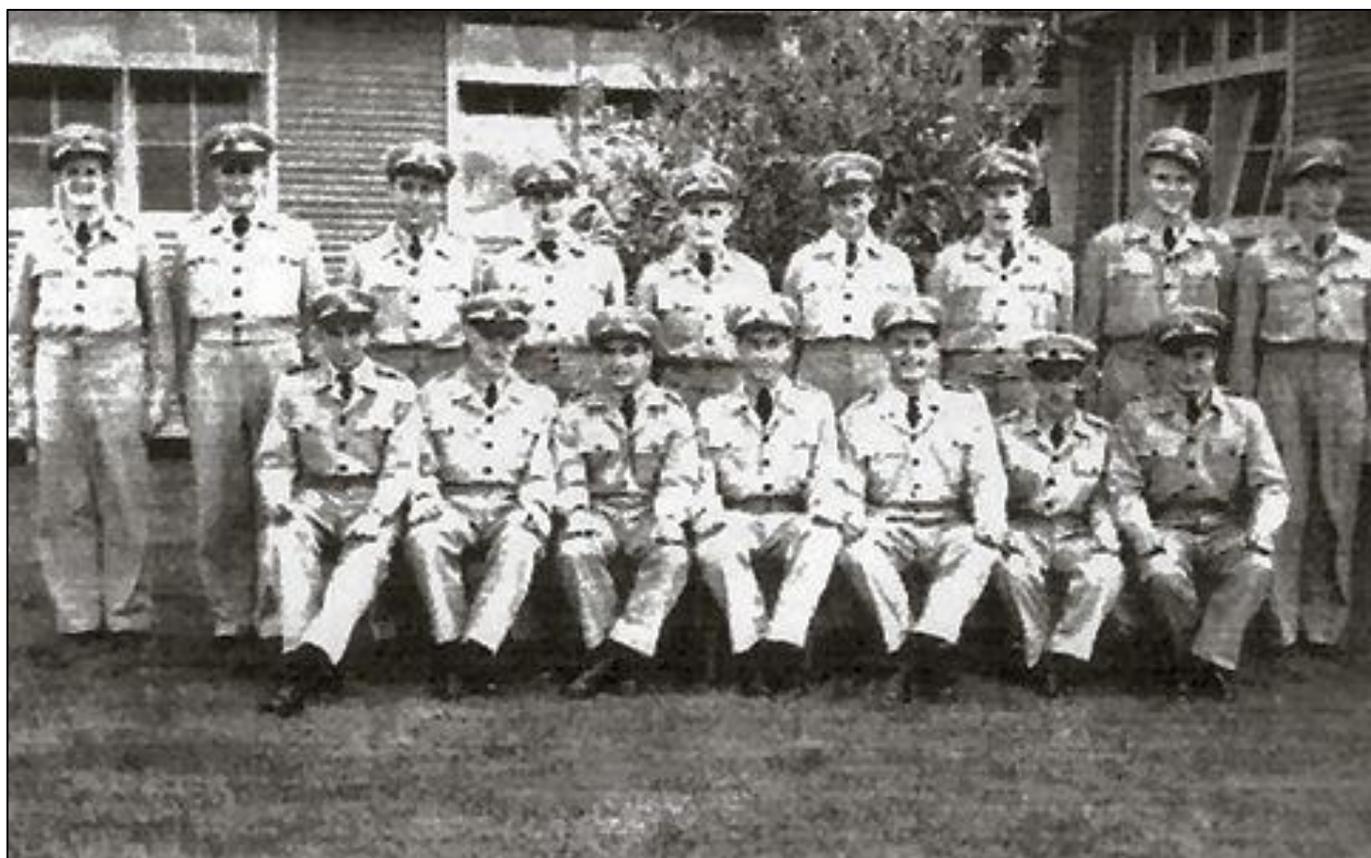
When the training programme ceased in mid 1944, a total of over 10,000 WAGS had been trained through the output of No 1 W.A.G S at Ballarat, No 2 at Parkes NSW and No 3 at Maryborough Qld

In November 1945, No 1 W.A.G.S was disbanded and the Air and Ground Radio School was formed in its stead, however, it remained virtually moribund for most of the next two years because of Government vacillation about the size and extent of a post-war Royal Australian Air Force. This included among other things, Radio training policy for the re-structured force. In the event, the first training courses commenced in February 1947 for Telegraphists, Teleprinter Operators and Signals Clerks. Other training courses to follow were, Radio Servicemen, Radio/Radar Technicians both Air and Ground (who were to replace the earlier musterings of

Wireless Maintenance/Radar Mechanics and Wireless Operator Mechanics. Basic electronics courses for other and allied RAAF engineering trades were also conducted from time to time. The previous aircrew category of Wireless Air Gunner was re-categorised as Signaller (with the gunnery aspects having been made redundant). So, this was pretty much the state of the art when Air and Ground Radio School was eventually disbanded and School of Radio took its place. It could be argued, a cosmetic name change only rather than a change in function or direction.

Later in April 1961 as part of the implementation of a Defence rationalisation plan, School of Radio was relocated to Laverton and thus ended a twenty-one year close association of RAAF with Ballarat and its citizens.

However, before leaving these historical aspects, I have yet to cover the other Historic event, namely, the 1948 No 1 Course Radio Apprentice Graduation in 1951.



Graduation of No 1 Radio Apprentice Course Air and Ground Radio School, 1951 ([Back](#))

Immediate post-WWII the Engineering Branch Radio specialists of the RAAF could foresee, quite dramatic and explosive changes taking place in the electronic communications expansion of the second half of the 20th century. This among many other considerations would require a considerable lifting of the skills of the radio engineering trades to a level then not within the training capabilities of an embryonic permanent Air Force.

Another vital aspect was for the RAAF Recruiting system to be able to compete with the many civil training institutions as far as the preparation for tomorrow's engineers were concerned.



A wintry Entrance to the HQ Building.



The Gymnasium on a White Frosty Morning



No Parade this Morning, Still Snowing.

Pre-war civilian industry apprenticeships, which had been virtually put asunder in the five-year long war-time situation, were starting to re-emerge. Why not said the RAAF planners, adopt, similar to the Royal Air Force system where 15 year olds are able to join as boy entrants

(Apprentices) and after 4-5 years accredited secondary/tertiary trade training, be granted a Trade classification of Fitter, Turner, Machinist or whatever. Why not indeed became the catch-cry. An in-depth study was undertaken, the success of which required considerable underpinning by State/Commonwealth technical colleges in order to provide the vital ingredient of trade accreditation by way of an Associate Diploma.

So and within the RAAF's Training Policy Directorates, a Radio Apprenticeship and an Engineering Apprenticeship scheme was proclaimed with training to commence in 1948. As this part of my story concerns Ballarat, thus the reason for my singling out the 1951 Graduation of the first course of Radio Apprentices. These young lads, who had undergone three years full-time training at the Royal Melbourne Technical College (see my story later on dealing with their domestic arrangements at RAAF Frognall) and a final year at School of Radio, were an indelible part of RAAF history. Furthermore, in the case of the proof of the pudding being in the eating many apprentices went on to become Group Captains, even an Air Commodore or two, Historic facts indeed.

Now, before getting too far away from the photograph of the graduating apprentices in looking at it again, just as I write this, I am reminded of a story which I am sure will bring out an interesting aside on what is sometimes known as rank begetting power.

A quick reference back to this photo, depicts the apprentices concerned in what was termed, at that time, summer dress i.e. khaki jacket, trousers and cap cover, more commonly referred to as drabs. I hasten to say that during my time in the RAAF there were lots of different styles of drabs none of them smart (except W/Off 's and Officers whose were tailor-made and were referred to as pansy drabs), including at one stage a safari jacket, that looked as if made from onion bags?

My story concerns the cap cover, or, to give it its full service nomenclature, Caps, cover, cloth, drab, peaked caps for the use of. Air Marshal Scherger (also [mentioned](#) earlier as a Flying Officer, piloting a Bristol Bulldog in the 30's) when Chief of the Air Staff in the late '50's early 60's, was travelling from Essendon airport to Townsville on the occasion of his annual inspection, dress of the day in Townsville was summer/dress drabs. Scherg as he was affectionately known to all and sundry, had arrived at Essendon airport fully booted and spurred in the correct summer dress, only he had forgotten his Cap Cover cloth drab, His young Flight Lieutenant aide, reminded him of this fact, quickly uttering (and thinking at the same time perhaps of early promotion), you can borrow mine sir and I'll get one in Townsville. to which Scherg is reported to have said: Flight Lieutenant make a signal from CAS to all Base, Squadron and Units Commanders:- effective forthwith, caps, cover, cloth drab, are no longer to be worn with summer dress. Scherg thus duly arrived at Townsville in the correct dress of the day complete with navy blue cap.

***Air Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger (RAAF) KBE CBE CB DSO DFC
Chief of the Air Staff
19th March 1957, 28th May 1961 [\(Back\)](#)***



Now where were we before the aside on Cap covers? It was actually three years earlier when, on 13th March 1948, my four troops and I were about to leave the tea-rooms, repair back to the Railway Station to summon

our earlier postponed pick-up to travel to the Ballarat RAAF camp in the splendour and comfort of a RAAF Tender.

All of this, although happening for the first time I must say, became a many times journey during the next three years. We headed out past the Plow and Harrow pub, (a great watering hole then for many RAAFies.), to the Convent corner and then along the Creswick Road which led to the RAAF camp. From memory, a distance of five or six miles. There was an awareness of a great number of pine trees not only lining the road, but indeed dotted all over the place, particularly in the paddocks. Trees which had been planted some fifty or more years earlier, as was the custom in those days, to provide some form of wind-break for stock, crops and the homestead. Trees that also had an umbrella mantling effect for the oft falling snow in winter. There were many occasions during most winters, when the Ballarat district pine-trees would be a perfect background for Christmas cards

As the Tender pulled up at the RAAF main gate, thoughts crossed mind, as well as I'm sure, the minds of the other four, as to what now lies ahead. Looking around on arrival there was nothing startling about the architecture or the un-Airforce-like appearance of the general environment. The airfield and hangars being some considerable distance from the domestic area.

The first event after reporting to the Administrative Wing Headquarters Orderly Room, was to receive our Clearance Form. A rather unique piece of paper which had to have a dozen or more signatures applied to it over the next few hours. Not only to prove that one had arrived, but also to have your name recorded on every official journal. The most important two being, the Pay Section (for money reasons) then the Barracks Store, where blankets and pillows (no sheets in those days) were issued. And, not wanting to forget (?), the pallias and the collection of the appropriate straw with which to fill it. (I'm happy to say that it was not long after this, that proper mattresses were introduced for other ranks ie. AC's, LAC's and Corporals). Senior NCO's and Officers had long been entitled to mattresses, sheets and proper beds in their rooms. The Barracks Store Clerk, who held a nominal roll of all Corporals and below had the responsibility for allocating the appropriate hut numbers and bed spaces to which one would later refer to as home for the time being, and, in which one also found, at that time anyway, the ubiquitous Cyclone gate bed (complete with folding legs.).

It usually took most of the day to be cleared-in. The same procedure applied when on posting out except on those occasions the main interest being that you couldn't depart without everybody knowing it, thus permitting the removal of your name where-ever it had been recorded on arrival. I later learned that there was a certain discrimination about Clearances Forms. Squadron Leaders and above had a lesser mortal deputised to go around the traps for them, gathering each required Clearance Form signature.

The thing that I noticed about the RAAF camp at Ballarat was the similarity between it and that of West Sale and East Sale, principally a tin city. Although Laverton also had its tin city it, in the main, was a permanent brick and tile establishment having been developed as a peace-time Station in the early '20's.

RAAF Ballarat was one of the 49 hastily built to a master plan in 1940. For this reason I did feel a little at home because the domestic area, (and indeed the tarmac area too), were similarly configured to the lay-out which I had previously experienced. I knew exactly where the various

Messes were, the gymnasium, the picture theatre, the medical section, Headquarters and one could not miss the parade ground, located just outside the Headquarters which, incidentally, was divided into two Wings, one Administrative and one Training, Instructional Staff being part of the Training Wing set-up.

My earlier mention of Ballarat being cold in winter, reminds me of just how cold were the galvanised iron (or tin?) huts in which we not only slept, but also in the buildings in which we worked. Not forgetting the leisure- time facilities which were constructed of the same beastly bloody cold non-insulating material,

There was a practice during those times, where we were issued with an extra great-coat, (a pre-War model which was de-faulted because of being too short, and for which reason we called them bum-freezers. Although their official item name was greatcoats-U2 airmen-for-working-use-of). We not only wore them to work, but often to bed as well. Despite all buildings having a pot-bellied stove, there was still insufficient radiant heat. It also beats me how there weren't more buildings catching fire because of the tendency of we cold little sprogs to over-stoke the stoves before retiring for the night.

The buildings were beastly bloody cold in winter.

In my pre-occupation with the vagaries of the Ballarat meteorological system, I forgot to mention my 4 troops whose safe and sound arrival was not necessarily due to any of my particular diligence, (or even to my previously discovered, but latent, leadership qualities). As each of them was destined for a training course, our paths quickly separated theirs to which I did not keep track, (a weakness in leadership skills?) and mine to the Training Wing Headquarters and my introduction to WOff Hedger (Frank) the Assistant Chief Instructor.



I was pleasantly surprised at the trouble he took to fill me in, a mere AC1, with the then short post-war history of the place. The first Commanding Officer, 1945 - 47, was Wg Cdr Bill Guthrie, a GD Pilot, (with whom I worked at Point Cook some 18 years later). He was followed (by the current C.O), another pilot, in particular of considerable war-time bomber-raid fame, Wg Cdr Rollo Kingsford-Smith DSO, DFC. The Instructional staff comprised some 13 officers 9 Warrant Officers, 23 junior and senior NCO's and the planned trainee strength of 150, which already had been exceeded to 200 plus (and in fact, at its peak, reached around 400 in the early 50's).

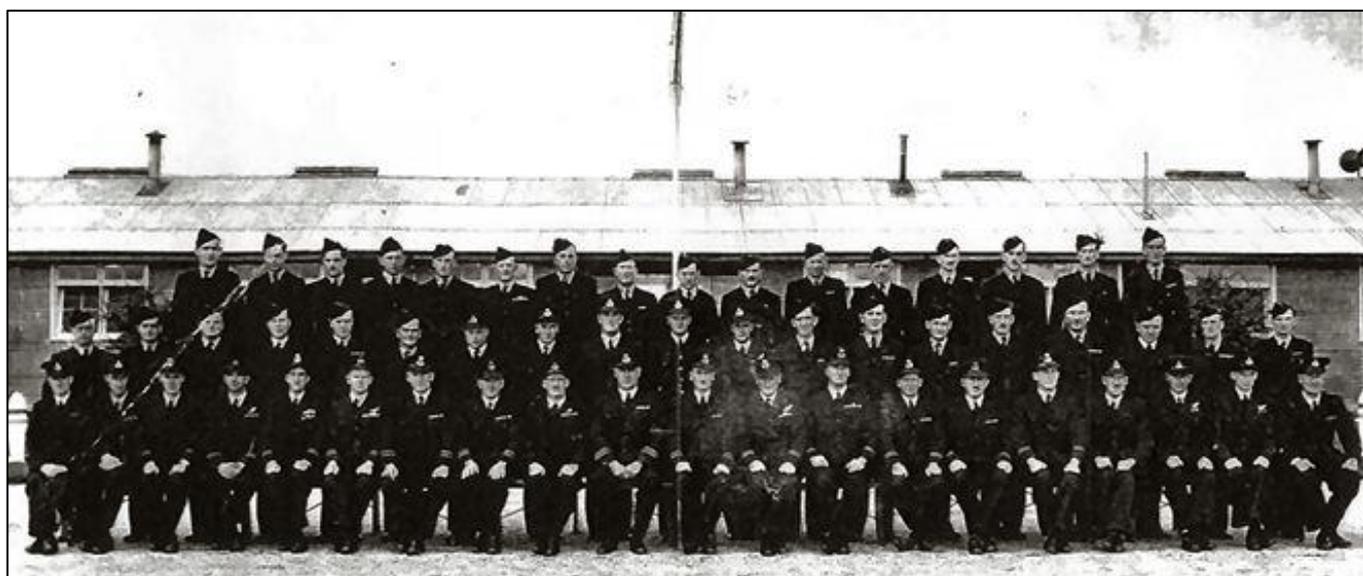
As we will find out as we go along, I had a lot more to do with Frank Hedger than originally intended. For the moment however, he next introduced me to the WOff in-charge of the Telegraphy Pool, Dick Bell, who was surprised to find that I was only an AC1, knowing that all instructors were either Corporals, Senior NCO's or, in some cases even officers. I am sure it was he who made the pot boil in this regard, as I was an acting Corporal within a few weeks. (there it goes again, that (latent) leadership quality? I was beginning to wonder to what extent this latent attenuation would eventually extend. I didn't begin any instructing during those first few weeks whilst awaiting the grant of my Corporal chevrons but spent my time on Air Force

familiarisation, as well as attending informal lectures given by some of my NCO and WOff work-mates. The acting rank was seemingly soon bestowed and just as quickly sewn on to my sleeves, (and for the first few weeks, pulsated harmoniously, in the meantime some trainees labelling me Adolf, no doubt with reference to his once being a mere Corporal too).

My first day of instructional duties had arrived. Pretty simple really, firstly to teach a group of about 24 trainees the Morse code and then how to use a Morse key and how to receive, quite slowly sent, Morse. Simple that is, until the psychology of human behaviour soon entered the equation, particularly the behaviour of trainees each of whom had different personality characteristics. Most of them had recently undergone a rookies course and were probably looking towards a slackening of the need for discipline but a training school was no place for this type of misapprehension to be fostered. What we were fostering though was a distinct Yes sir. No sir attitude without questioning, this was the yardstick of the day.

Frank Hedger then explained to me that the teletype/teleprinter functions of the Telegraphist mustering were taught, in conjunction with the Morse aspects, by a W Off Teleprinter Operator, Col Kelly and his staff. In addition, all procedural aspects of Air Force telecommunications had to be learned to better equip me for an all-round knowledge which in turn assured a future flexibility within the School for my subsequent instructional interchange between these procedural matters and the straight manipulative Morse skill instruction.

Training School routine was another matter to be addressed. Reveille (it was still called that in the times about which I now speak) usually at 0600. Hut tidiness, ablutions (shower, shave and shampoo,). Breakfast and then to be within the vicinity of the parade ground by 0745 hours for the daily fall-in at 0800 when a ritual parade ground drill would be followed.



Instructional staff, Air and Ground Radio School, Ballarat, 1948. ([Back](#))

The RAAF ensign would be raised with the rolling of drums, clicking of the heels and appropriate salutes given followed by the reading-out by the Orderly Officer, of the Daily Routine Orders to be adopted by all, or as appropriate. Then each flight of airmen would be inspected by Squadron Commanders. The Commanding Officer would do this inspection himself as part of his weekly parade each Tuesday morning, which he would then follow with a personal inspection of various parts of the establishment, none of which you would be given

any warning beforehand. So, everyone was on their toes.

As far as off-Base leave was concerned, there were no strict limits for members of staff, except on those occasions when they would be rostered, after-hours, for Guard Commander (all Corporals), Orderly Sergeant (all senior NCO's and W Officers) and Orderly Officer, Pilot Officers, Flying Officers and Flight Lieutenants. (Squadron Leaders and above being exempt). Trainees on the other hand, were only granted off-base leave on Wednesday nights and weekends.

Despite RAAF Ballarat still having a serviceable airfield with two quite extensive runways and a number of permanent hangars, the role of the place did not require any on-base aircraft. The latter having disappeared when the Wireless Air Gunnery School disbanded in 1945. There was no constant buzzing of aircraft to either break the tedium, or provide a reminder that we all were really in the Royal Australian Air Force,

There were certain aspects of the Training Syllabi which provided a need for some in-the-air time, however, this need was serviced on an as required basis from time to time by visiting aircraft from other RAAF bases. (I can remember being back there in 1954 and having a flip in a four-engined Lincoln as part of our training course).

It was too, still very much an era, suffering from WWII shortages. In this regard, the ownership of a motor-car was still pretty much a rarity. I had a Panther motor-cycle soon after my arrival at Ballarat, as did quite a lot of other young staff members. Motor-car ownership was not encouraged among trainees. The main recreational pursuits after a day in the class-room, involved either the Unit cinema, two or three times per week, the gymnasium which was well-equipped or the recreation hut's table tennis, library and snack bar (occasionally staffed by the Salvos or other volunteers either from Ballarat or members of the Unit family). [\(Back\)](#)



At this time rather than having any particular outside interests I was pre-occupied with getting to know my new environment and making a success of a new challenge which hopefully, if not leading to a flying career, might lead to eventual commissioning. However, with both of these aspirations, the prejudicial effects of having only 3rd year level at high school could well put me at a competitive disadvantage with other more experienced and better educated applicants either from civvy street or from within the RAAF.

I was hoping to overcome both of these aspects by projecting other strengths, i.e a resolve to my quickly mastering my NCO role as an Instructor together with an obvious and still growing, affection of things flying and in particular, things RAAF.

A seeming short few weeks after my arrival at Ballarat the command of the School changed again with the arrival, I think around April 1948, of Wing Commander John E Reynolds, the first non-Pilot C.O. He was known, not necessarily with any affection, as Joe and whom, by reputation, was a hard task-master. But I sincerely believe on reflection, over the many years

since those days in the late '40's, that the record might more correctly show, that Joe Reynolds, despite the mantle as described above, was hardest with people who tried to work or buck the system. He also had a canny knack of spotting trouble before it had time to foment. He had come up through the Signals organisation ranks. Immediately pre-war was either a Flt/Sgt or WOff and, following commissioning, eventually became more deeply involved in the Training organisation.

My first day of instructional duty. ([Back](#))

I first fronted him, not long after he arrived, on the occasion of being interviewed for my application for aircrew training, for which applications were then being invited. Among his other reputation characteristics, it was also bandied around that he was not a particular lover of aircrew personnel. My only judgement on this can be that he recommended my application, which went through the next stage for selection and which amounted to my being on a short- list for posting to the Initial Training School at Somers.



Unfortunately my expectations were short-lived when I was advised that any question of my being selected for aircrew would be deferred until the current critical shortage of instructors at AGRS had been resolved. And then there could be no guarantee of my selection having regard to the general calibre of other applicants at any future given time.

Although disappointed, I resolved that it was not the end of the world and that with the upperage limit for air-crew training of 25, (I seem to re-call at the time), I still had a three or four years up my sleeve, for a possible further opportunity. Unfortunately, it didn't happen due to another selection obstacle intervening which I will discuss again later on and which I have not regretted. Some interesting aspects of the time that I applied for aircrew were:

- There were only six recommended by Wg Cdr Joe out of about three dozen applicants. Three of them, Aircraftsmen Ross Cook, Don Ellis and Lyall Klaffer were doing radio training at the time they were selected and eventually graduated as Pilots. Ross Cook was killed in a Dakota accident in Western Australia and Don Ellis was shot down and killed in Korea. Lyall Klaffer, well-known throughout the RAAF and who had a successful flying career reaching the rank of Air Commodore before retiring in the '70's.
- Another selected for the same course, but not from Ballarat was Ray Trebilco. He also had a successful flying career, interrupted for a time to be a Japanese linguist. He also attained air rank, retiring as an Air Vice-Marshal in the '80's, spent time as the Administrator of Norfolk Island, following which he spent a lot of time in Japan in the commercial sphere where his Japanese linguistic ability would have been of great advantage. He died in the mid-90's after some years of retirement on the Gold Coast.

Ray Trebilco had been a good friend among an Air Force golfing group of about 26, we played together every Wednesday. (I often joked about the fact that our number contained that much scrambled eggs on their hats, that if a RAAF ensign was raised most of them could play the part of a spirited visiting A.O.C (Air Officer Commanding),

Now let's get back to Ballarat in 1948. I was earlier discussing my pre-occupation with settling into the scheme of things at A.&G.R.S and not having time, or inclination for things, extra curricular, (again no Roma's or Rae's, the closest being two un-eaten ham sandwiches in a Ballarat tea-room). Things were about to change and quite incredibly, the Ballarat climate was something of a catalyst for this.

Not being in the Sergeant's (or Officers) Mess and airmen not having Airmen's Clubs in those days, the only area for relaxing after tea at night was in the Recreation Hut. I was in the Recreation Hut one night after tea, trying to keep warm by the pot-bellied stove (it was mid-winter, June, by this time) and munching on a pie and swallowing a nice cup of hot Cocoa, (more likely to be known these days as hot chocolate) when in came a number of airmen and an officer I recognized, in tennis gear. It was about six degrees below outside, I knew that we didn't have a squash court and there were no night tennis facilities, so couldn't imagine why they were dressed in this way, until learning they were badminton players.

They each seemed to have a bit of a sweat-up and looked to be full of beans and I wondered how chasing a bunch of feathers with a flimsy racket could have appeal. The officer was the Accountant Officer, a Flying Officer Pollard, (I knew he was called Snub, but at my stage in Air Force life, all officers were sir to me), however, I soon engaged in conversation with him and quickly surmised that he was the leader of the, badminton, push. Not only that, but he said he was the Tasmanian Singles Badminton champion before joining the RAAF. He soon had me interested and asked me if I'd like to come and watch their last few sets when they finished their drink and snack. This I did, I was soon intrigued and quickly hooked.

I went into Ballarat the next day, purchased a racquet, shoes, shorts and shirt, even a Rule book. It didn't take me long, after two or three nights a week to be able to acquit myself reasonably well. Snub insisted I call him by this nickname when we were at badminton, which I found difficultly with at the start but soon became accustomed to it. (Later on, in my Service life, this relaxing of rank was found in most areas where mixed ranks were playing sport together and very few ever abused the privilege). Snub told me that in the Ballarat district there were more clubs than anywhere else in Australia. Something like seventy, they all played competition one night per week. The RAAF were not able to compete in this as each Club had to field both males and females, in order that mixed matches could also be played as part of the Badminton Association's annual winter competition.

This aspect did not faze me too much, as I was enjoying the badminton nights, even if they were not mixed and that we were not able to compete in the local competition. One day, a few weeks later, Snub told me that he had been speaking at Church the previous Sunday, in Ballarat, to the Secretary of the badminton Club at St Alipius Catholic Church. He said in discussions with her she had agreed to occasionally bring some ladies from her club out to the RAAF camp for a social badminton night.

On the first occasion I could not believe my eyes when I walked into the gym to greet the Ballarat ladies and when being introduced to the Secretary, realised she was the nice looking young lady and the donor of the two ham sandwiches, in that tea-room on my first day in Ballarat many months previous. We spoke about the coincidence, although she would not have remembered me particularly as she had not taken time to really have a good look at me before hurrying off from the cafe. In the event, it seemed to be just that, although we had some

pleasant badminton there were no social plans or exchanges. Snub Pollard had not meant anyway, that the occasion be any more than an opportunity for some mixed badminton experiences.

This same occasion happened a few times over the next two or three months and it was great fun. However, winter was soon over and so too was the badminton season. I must say though I was looking forward to the cold weather again, if only to resume chasing the little shuttlecock around the gym, ladies or no ladies,

During the next few months, I continued the Recreation Hut routine and, quite often solved the what-to-do problem by going to bed early. Sometimes the prompting to do the latter was occasioned by an empty purse and pay-day being still a day or two away too. There were no temptations for pursuing a social life on or off the camp.

It seemed no time that Christmas was upon us. The training programme shut down for about three weeks and everyone went on leave. I spent Christmas with my sister and her husband in Melbourne and returned to Ballarat early in January. I'd run out of money so thought camp was the best place for me where if nothing else, the meals were free. I'd ridden my motor-bike down and barely had enough money for petrol for the return journey. The first night I was back, there was no one else but me in the hut, all the other guys being still on leave. I had my tea, had a shower and was just getting into bed when one of my hut-mates, Kingsley Jamieson, walked in. He'd been playing tennis and said he was going to have a shower, get dressed-up and go into town on the bus to see a good picture that he had been told about. He asked me would you like to come? I declined by telling him I was broke. He said no worries, if you'd like to go I'll shout you the bus fare and the entry to the pictures.

I'd heard about the picture too, so I changed my mind and agreed to accompany him.

It was a good picture, which I thoroughly enjoyed. As we were walking out, would you believe I spotted the lass from the Church badminton group. She was dressed in a beautiful ankle-length white suit and brown as a berry. I hadn't seen her since the badminton season but she did look as tremendous as she did when I first saw her. She spotted me too, but this time, thank goodness, did not attempt to rush away. We exchanged pleasantries, she telling me she was just back from two weeks at Cowes (Phillip Island Victoria) and had a marvellous time, and I told her about the continuing great time out at camp.

Kingsley in the meantime, said he'd see me on the bus and walked away. The lass and I chatted about this and that for quite some time until we noticed we were the only ones still in the theatre precincts. I looked at my watch and realised I'd missed the bus and what's more, didn't have the taxi fare to the camp. I wasn't about to tell my new found lady-friend that I was stoney broke. However, she said don't worry about a taxi, I've got my car outside and I don't mind driving you out to the camp. That beautiful young lady's name is Mattee and, as history would show, she was to become the wonderful mother of our two children and my beautiful wife.

So what a Cinderella story. Of course, being broke in Melbourne helped to set the scene. And still with little change, a short-time later, back in my hut, set the scene even further with Kingsley's invite to the flicks. One wonders, what if it had been a dud of a picture, we would never have been tempted to go and I may not have met Mattee again? So the whole thing was,

as I've so often said - and have kept saying ever since, a marvellous bit of luck, or act of fate, fate that was meant to be, right from my very first day in Ballarat, in March the previous year.

Ordinarily, in situations such as the above theatre episode and despite the offer of a lift after the pictures, supper would be taken first, as this was really part of a night out at the pictures. And, by supper, I do not mean coffee and biscuits, or tea with toasted raisin bread. As there were a number of cafes still open from which to choose, a meal could also be had, consisting of fish, chips and salad, or even, if a cold winters night, steak and eggs. However, you might remember that I didn't have a bean and, the aforesaid Knight Errant, Kingsley Jamieson, with his pocket full of brass was long out at the camp, so I feigned, not being thirsty nor hungry and perhaps we should hit the road. Mattee, was quite happy with this having just a few days earlier had the long drive from Phillip Island.

We chatted about this and that on the way out to the camp. At the same time I complimented her, not only on her nice little car, a 1948 Hillman Minx, (a far cry from my 1939 Panther motor-cycle) but also her obvious skill as a driver. It was then that she told me that she had enlisted as an 18 year old ambulance driver during the war in the A.W.A.S, (Australian Womens Army Service), having enlisted in 1941 and my being something of a whiz at mental arithmetic, this made her four years older than me and could well put finito to any chance of hearts fluttering and possible leading to walking-out together. ([Back](#))



Thankfully and initially anyway, there was no comment, or even mention, of an age differences from either of us.

By the time we reached the entrance gates of the RAAF camp, I had learned that Mattee and her mother lived in the home of her maternal grandmother in East Ballarat. She and her sister Lucy, two years older, were the only children of Vera and Bert Hayes. They were born in Ballarat and had been reared in this house by their grandmother. At this particular point in time, I also became aware that the grandmother had died some years earlier. Lucy, had stayed in the house with their mother for company during the period that Mattee was away in the army.

One of Lucy's hobbies had been the gathering of overseas pen- friends, many of whom lived in Canada to where she emigrated just after Mattee was discharged from the Army in January 1946. (I met her in 1948 when she came home for a short holiday. After returning to Canada the only contact was an occasional Christmas post card and even that eventually ceased with a resultant complete loss of contact).

Mattee also told me that her work was at the Ballarat Teachers College where she was the Principal's secretary as well as being in charge of the College office.

It was then my turn to give a quick run-down on my family back- ground, which was pretty much a potted version of what you have read already in this narrative. It was quite remarkable how quickly we seemed to gell in that short time from meeting at the picture theatre until we arrived

out at the camp.

There is little doubt we could have sat in the car and talked for hours but, except for a quick cigarette, which when cigarettes were finished we then bid each other good-night. (We both smoked in those days, Mattee only occasionally, but I kept up the habit until 20 years later, details of which can wait until our narrative calendar reaches that point in the story).



My darling Mattee, (revealed to my readers at last) [\(Back\)](#)
Portrait taken on our engagement day- Mattee's birthday 4th October 1949



The Extremely Proud Ted
(Also taken on our engagement day) [\(Back\)](#)

No attempt was made, by either of us, at even a platonic peck on the cheek. She then drove off, and I stood there watching her tail-lights until they disappeared into the distant shadows of the road and the pine-trees, leaving me, I must admit, with my head in a whirl and not being able to wait until next time. If there is such a thing, I guess I'd fallen hopelessly in love and, what's more, for the first time in my life, I was the first to break the ice by ringing her at the Teacher's College a couple of days later. I did not want to appear too anxious and I would have been devastated had I ruined everything by appearing to be too pushy.

As it was not particularly easy/convenient to ring me at the camp I initiated the almost daily telephone contact during the following week. Then at the next weekend, I arranged to take her to the pictures. We went to supper, I can't remember what Mattee ate, but I remember quite clearly that I had battered whiting and salad. Then she drove me home and on this occasion when parting, there was a gentle kiss. (gentle maybe but it was an over-the-moon experience for me).

So a really wonderful courtship began and soon reached the stage where Mattee would come and pick me up at the camp. This was usually on Saturday mornings, following which I would spend the whole day with her, often driving to different local places of interest that I had never seen and which Mattee had grown up with. She introduced me to some of her work-mates and some of the College students with whom she had developed social contact during various College events.

Meanwhile, our Wing Commander Joe had become a little concerned at the imbalance of Instructor ranks among the NCO's. His concern that the few, (about four of us), Corporal instructors that were involved, (most of whom were only acting Corporals anyway, as was indeed the case with me), should be, for the purposes of maintaining discipline with the trainees, of a minimum rank of Sergeant. So it came to pass (as they say in the classics, or even in the good book), that in mid-1949 we 4 corporals concerned were promoted to acting Sergeant rank. This provided a terrific morale lift to me anyway, not only the extra 5/8d per day (about 56 cents, but at that time about a 25% increase in pay.), also the fact that I would be living in the Sergeants Mess, with a room of my own, complete with proper bed, sheets and pillow-cases and, even more importantly, privacy, on which it is hard to place a value.

The other advantages of course, were that, (as with all Sergeant's and Officer's Messes and as I had earlier experienced at Sale and in Cairns), the facilities of the Mess itself were fantastic, open fire billiard room, table tennis room, library, bar, a dining-room with nice cutlery, linen table cloths and serviettes and being waited on at meal time. Such luxurious living was my catch-cry.

So the remainder of 1949, was something special in so many respects and doubtless, the next most special event was my getting down on my knees and popping the question. Mattee's father, whom I had never met, had passed on, so there was no permission to be sought. We announced our engagement on Mattee's 26th birthday, 4th October 1949, I was at the almost same mature age with my reaching towards 23 years by the following March.

[\(Back\)](#)



Common interests had developed between us and were being exercised regularly. Mattee was a member of the Ballarat Lawn Tennis Club to which she arranged for me to become a member (something of an elite environment too in those days). I had played tennis a little bit, but my inexperience on the court soon became obvious. So we spent a lot of time during the week after

work, quietly practicing. Of course the winter months which were just petering out, provided the annual opportunities for some marvellous badminton. Both of us joined the Ballarat Central Badminton Club, which was very strong in talent some of which rubbed off on to us as soon evidenced by our becoming B Grade singles champions as well as the same in doubles. We

even continued the practice of inviting ladies out to the RAAF badminton nights, however, this lost considerable direction when Snub Pollard was posted away from Ballarat. Strangely enough, badminton for both Mattee and me was revitalised almost ten years later in Malaysia where we were to again meet up with Snub, he by this time a Wg Cdr and me a Flt Lt.

During 1950, we both had a bit of a penchant for having a larger motor car. So Mattee sold her Hillman, me my motor bike and we pooled our resources and purchased a brand new Vanguard (which went out of production in the late 50's but they were a marvellous motor car). This was not our intention. We had seen a 1948 Ford V8 advertised at Craig's motors, where Mattee worked before going to the Teacher's College. The appeal of a second-hand car was not part of the equation. It was simply that WWII shortages were still having an effect on local vehicle supply and production. A new car purchase required a twelve to eighteen months wait from time of ordering until actual date of delivery. Anyway, we were committed to purchasing something else, straight away, Mattee having already sold her Hillman.

We proceeded to Craig's Motors, where we had a ride in the Ford which was pretty nice. On return we noticed a brand new maroon Vanguard being prepared in the workshop for collection. Arch Craig then asked Mattee, if she had driven a Vanguard? Mattee rejoined with a definite no and what's the point anyway, even if we liked it we would have to wait at least twelve months for one. With that Arch threw her the keys of the said Vanguard and said take it for a spin so away we went. Well sheer joy but wishing we hadn't done it because we certainly didn't want to wait 12 months for one. Moreover, it was more than we were prepared to pay, price being 900 pounds. Mattee thanked Arch, whereupon, he asked would we buy it if it could be organised? She looked at me. I looked at her and we both nodded. Arch then picked up the phone and rang a local doctor who had been waiting twelve months for this particular car. He said ; Hello Doctor, your car has arrived at last, but I've some bad news, some wharfies in Melbourne, (most cars were imported at that time), when they were unloading the car must have decided to take a short-cut across the roof of your car in their hob-nail boots with some resultant rather nasty scratches and dents, but it can easily be fixed. Will take a couple of days, but you'll never know the difference when you pick it up. His retort went something like this there's no way I'm going to take delivery of a bloody new car that was damaged in shipment. How long will I have to wait for another one. Arch replied the next shipment is due in four weeks and I will be able to re-allocate one of those to you, the good Doctor then reluctantly agreed.



Arch then told us the roof had been slightly damaged in transit but had been repaired and as far as we were concerned it will never be noticed. So we finished up with a brand new Vanguard. about which there is a story or two for later on. Suffice to say it turned out to be a magnificent motor car. It gave considerable pleasure to us both including opportunities to travel further afield with greater comfort than possible in the little Hillman.

[\(Back\)](#)

At the time that these events were occurring, mid 1950, engagements-to-marry were normally for at least a year before nuptials took place, or often longer. In our case we decided that the month of May 1951 would be about right,



Shopping for the ring.

Our engagement did put another spanner in the air-crew training works though. All applicants for air-crew courses at that time, had still to be single when their training commenced, based on some psychological theory of single men not being as conservative as married men and therefore likely to be more gung-ho when confronting a potential enemy. Being gung-ho or otherwise, if we announced our engagement which predicated marriage it would make me illegible for aircrew training. That then became the case, much and all that being a RAAF pilot had been my (eternal) aim, it was a non-issue with Mattee taking its place and one not open for exchange.

[\(Back\)](#)

I need now to go back a few months to about May 1950, when a temporary job change, (although I did not know it then), would significantly alter my career path in the Air Force and subsequently too, even my retirement employment. As already mentioned, the Headquarters at Ballarat was divided between Administrative and Training Wings. Each had an Orderly Room and was usually each run by a Sergeant clerk with several airmen Clerks. Well, the Training Wing orderly room had in fact been run by a locally employed civilian who had almost become indispensable and had orchestrated the place from its inception some three years earlier. A propensity for the grape created some health problems for him to the extent that one day he did not report for work, nor was he able to subsequently turn up. My skill as an ex-PMG telegraphist typist had become quickly known at AGRS and Wg Cdr Joe summoned me to his office and told me that I was to run the Training Wing orderly room until further notice. In fact further notice turned out to last until eighteen months later when posted in November 1951. Oddly enough, although the variety of administrative tasks in the Orderly Room were considerable, I loved every minute of it and found, that I had a flair for such things. With the earlier mentioned WOff Frank Hedger as my immediate boss, who was one of nature's gentlemen, we developed into a great team. I was also fortunate in having a couple of rather keen RAAF Clerks to assist me. There is little doubt, this broadening of experience in such a completely different field, set the course for my future professional direction in the Air Force, but more of that later.

With the new work environment and my now constant life-sharing with Mattee, 1950 seemed to just whizz-by. Our wedding, to be celebrated on 26th May 1951, in Ballarat's Christ Church Cathedral, with the knot being tied by an Uncle of mine, the Rev Charles Partridge, (also Captain C. H. Partridge AIF). He was the uncle that my sister Joan had gone to live-with, back in 1940, for a few months at Mirboo North, with Auntie Ame. Charlie Jones agreed to be my best man and a life-long girl-friend of Mattee's, Joyce Tolliday to be her bridesmaid.

As Mattee and I were obliged to pay for our own wedding, some careful budgeting was necessary as to size of the invitation list. Also the extent of what, in those days, was commonly referred to as the wedding breakfast i.e. venue, catering, wedding cake, flower arrangements etc. In addition, as to the budgeting for our honeymoon, it would need to be either one of two week's, (the extent of the leave we had at the time), mediocrity or, a week of luxury. The latter won and definitely became the icing on the cake.



Our Wedding Day ([Back](#))
Christ Church Cathedral, Ballarat, 26th May 1950.

We also chose, for our wedding breakfast a rather nice venue on the northern shores of Lake Wendouree, quite close to the Ballarat Botanical Gardens. It had been a beautiful Edwardian style home, with lovely gardens, verandas, lead-light glass windows, gables, etc, etc, which had been converted to what had become the more than popular Ballarat Reception and Banquet Centre. I guess the selection of this rather delightful place did, condition the size of the guest list, which we eventually pruned to a max. of 50.

As far as relatives were concerned, of which Mattee had very few and as mine were a considerable away, distance was also a restricting factor as not many then had a car.

The occasion went very much to plan, although it was a wintry Ballarat May day which and fortunately, developed into quite a nice sunny, but chilly, afternoon. I must confess to being particularly nervous as my own preparations were coloured with my being without any moral support during the morning lead-up to the ceremony. Regardless of the natural portends of misfortune befalling one, if one's eyes were cast on one's bride earlier than the service on the actual wedding day, I did in fact take a quick run out to Mattee's house in the Vanguard. So much like Mattee in everything that she did, there she was quite calm and collected which did give me confidence that all would be well; which, of course became the case. You can quite readily see, by the wedding photo, just how beautiful she looked in her bridal gown, made by her bridesmaid.

*Bridesmaid Joyce Tolliday and
Best Man Charlie Jones*
([Back](#))



The wedding reception was also one of warmth and friendliness and with the splendour of the catering. Charlie had his work cut out with his role of Best-man when it came to reading out the congratulatory telegrams. Although most contained some double entendre sentiments, none required censoring before-hand. There were forty-four to be read, I remember the number because we kept the telegrams and they were read-out again at our Golden Wedding which we celebrated three years ago here on the Gold Coast. (a sample of one is included hereunder).

Mattee, although in a wheel-chair, was quite well then. She knew nothing beforehand of the grand scale of the event. It was also a re- affirmation service of our vows. A great surprise for her and which she really enjoyed. The venue was at Coolangatta Tweed Heads Golf Club, among 64 guests, many RAAF and relatives and friends from far and wide. Letters of congratulations from Regal and Vice-Regal circles also gave us both great pleasure. (The celebrant for the re- affirmation was Air Commodore (Retd) Chaplain Clive King of whom more will be said later on).

The honeymoon venue we had selected was a delightful old home in the Mt Macedon area, called Derrewait. It snowed on quite a number of days while we were there, but the luxuriousness of the place, open fires and great food, were all present and which we very much enjoyed. Sadly, it was lost to the disastrous bushfires a few years later.

The Badminton season had started when we returned to Ballarat and which we were keen to resume. We also and quite often, made trips down to Melbourne, leaving about 4pm arriving in time to take in dinner somewhere nice before either a live-show or a good movie that might have been on at the time. An interest in Aussie Rules, VFL in those days, also made for trips to Melbourne but not all that frequent, as I was playing for Ballarat most Saturdays.

CHL. No.	Office of Origin	No. of Work	Title of Assignment	No. of
X197	OAKLEIGH	29	11/40A	
MR AND MRS TED ILTON 174				
243 HUMFRAY ST NTH BALLARAT				
CONGRATS AND BEST WISHES TO YOU BOTH AND MAY A LITTLE SUN FOLLOW THE RAIN LOVE ... SYLV ANEKEITH (243)				

The above telegram, together with the 43 others, [\(Back\)](#) was read out again at our Golden Wedding on 26th May 2001

Then, out-of-the-blue, (something of a bombshell too), came the news that I was to be posted to the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan. Seemingly, I still had confetti in my hair and, unlike such a posting up until that time, with the Korean war now in full-wing, it was no longer an accompanied posting i.e members could not be accompanied by wives and families. Like so many other entrants to the RAAF in those days, most people as soon as they enlisted, particularly from 1946 onwards, made Japan as their number one posting choice.

I certainly was one of these, I applied in 1948 and had given up when nothing had happened in the ensuing three years, up until now anyway. My posting to No 391 Base Squadron Iwakuni Japan, was to be effective as from 11th November 1951, I remember the date Armistice Day and the expected duration of the posting being 15 months.

Also, the only way one could avoid going, would be to have some strong compassionate grounds, a pregnant wife, or some serious family sickness. None of these could be applied to my situation, so I had to prepare myself mentally for the move and the long separation from my little bride. Of concern also, was the monetary aspect of some significant loss in pay. My being an Acting Sergeant would automatically mean loss of such rank on posting (the punitive aspect of which being the loss of 5/8d per day, or nearly 2 pounds per week). In mentioning this to WOff Frank Hedger, who pointed out to me that this aspect was, usually, included in the Posting Advice with the words clearly being shown loss of acting rank to apply. He further explained that no such words were on my posting advice and for his money, the omission indicated that I was to retain my three sergeant stripes. I was heightened by this, particularly when Wg Cdr Joe wished me all the best and said, you are apparently going to fill a Sergeant post at Iwakuni and this is why you are retaining your acting rank. I certainly was not going to create any waves and neither did I really think much more about it.

The weeks soon whizzed by and it seemed no time before I was packing my kit-bag, yes we still had such things even in those days (thoughts of the song pack up your troubles in the old kit-bag came to me at the time) and getting ready for the long train journey to Melbourne and then to Sydney. A trip which I had done once before about seven years earlier. Mattee said that she would drive me to Melbourne and I was quick to agree to this offer, thus permitting a few

more hours together. We had a tearful farewell at the Spencer Street station. I remember little of the journey to Sydney. All I could think of was our separation for the next fifteen months and how difficult it was going to be. These were her thoughts too, as confided to me during our last hug and kiss, last for a long time anyway. I was to spend a few days at the Richmond Base NSW for inoculations and the awaiting of the long Qantas flight to Japan. The Sergeant's Mess at Richmond was like a luxurious hotel compared to the Mess at Ballarat, and the comfort of those few days was a salve to my loneliness.

THE JAPAN DAYS. [\(Back\)](#)

The Aims:

The British Commonwealth Occupation Force, the bulk of which was made up of Australian Forces and Commanded by an Australian General, administered from Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. The main tasks and aims:

To maintain and enhance the prestige of the British Commonwealth of Nations by worthily representing it in the Occupation areas to demonstrate to the Japanese people the democratic way of life.

Tasks of the Occupation Force:-

- 1. Supervising the demilitarisation and disposal of Japanese Military installations and Armament, protecting Allied Installations and exercising control in five Prefectures on the Japanese Islands of Honshu and. the whole of the island of Shikoku.*
- 1. Repatriation through the ports in its designated areas of some 700,000 returning Japanese soldiers.*
- 2. Sea Land and Air Patrols to inhibit smuggling of illegal immigrants (mainly Koreans) and goods designated for the black market.*
- 3. Advice on engineering and town planning and assistance in restructuring Hiroshima.*
- 4. Protection of Allied Installations and equipment. (NB: 175 Australian Servicemen are recorded as having lost their lives carrying out these duties.)*

Before entering into the narrative of my 1951-52 experiences as a RAAF member of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) and having spelt out, the BCOF Charter, it might be useful to first trace the National commitment for the RAAF's involvement with BCOF. The first step, soon after cessation of hostilities in 1945, being to call for volunteers to become part of the RAAF's No 81 (Fighter) Wing of the Air component of what was titled the British



Commonwealth Air Group or BCair which also comprised flying units from the UK, India and New Zealand. No 81 Wing arrived in Japan, Kure, in February 1946. The Mustang fighters having completed a ferry flight from Labuan where they had been based, to Bofu in Southern Japan. The Wing in total, comprised three fighter squadrons, No's 76, 77 and 82, No 381 Base Squadron and No 481 Maintenance Squadron. The RAAF's No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron was despatched to Japan to refurbish the operational airfields at Miho, Bofu and Iwakuni.



[\(Back\)](#)

The primary role allotted the Wing was the daily mounting of flying surveillance patrols in and around the Inland Sea area with a view to monitoring and identifying maritime activities. The secondary role was that of a continuing Wing flying training programme.

In 1948 the British Government withdrew national forces from BCair leaving the RAAF as the sole representative for Commonwealth Air interests in Japan. The RAAF commitment was also reduced at the time with the disbandment of No 76 and 82 Squadrons and No 77 remaining in Japan (at Bofu) and whose planned 1950 withdrawal not eventuating due to the onset of the Korean War at that time. No 81 (Wing) was then reformed as No 91 (Composite) Wing. This was

the organisation in being and re-located at Iwakuni where I arrived in November 1951. This new



Wing, initially under the command of Group Captain A.D Charlton and followed by Group Captain A.T Carr comprised: No 77 Sqn with Mustangs and then later Meteor aircraft (first RAAF jet operations in combat), No 30 Communication Unit, (later changed to become No 36 Squadron), flying Dakota DC-3 aircraft, No 391 Base Squadron and No 491 Maintenance Squadron. The newly-formed Wing moved to Iwakuni and when the Korean war broke out in July 1950 and, with just a week into the war, No 77 Squadron's Mustangs launched their first operational sortie over the already early signs of a war-torn Korea. The Squadron soon moved from Japan to a succession of Bases, (alongside the USAF), in Korea as the United Nations' forces advanced and then retreated, Taegu, Pohang, Hamhung in North Korea then to Pusan, at the deep southern tip of South Korea. Thence, for the remainder of the war, to Kimpo, a few kilometres from Seoul and immediately south of the 38th Parallel border between North and South Korea.

Re-supply to the RAAF elements in Korea was occasioned on a daily basis from Iwakuni by Dakota aircraft. In addition, these aircraft flew many medevac sorties for wounded soldiers from the Korean theatre to military hospitals in Japan. Major aircraft and plant maintenance was undertaken in Japan by No 491 Maintenance Squadron with operational aircraft being rotated on a Korea-Japan-Korea basis. Due to the extreme climatic and hard conditions in Korea, RAAF ground staff were rotated on a 3 monthly basis from Japan. One of the early personnel problems with RAAF airmen in Korea was the lack of suitable severe weather protective clothing. Delays in provisioning did take some correcting so it was an occasion too for innovation, borrowing and improvising.

[\(Back\)](#)

As previously mentioned, from the early stages of the Occupation of Japan, (1946 or thereabouts), Australian servicemen were accompanied by their families. This policy ceased in 1950 with the beginning of the Korean War. However and because some families were already in Japan, there were some, (albeit short lived with safety considerations were taken into account), resultant morale problems among those now arriving unaccompanied. The operational pace of the Base kept minds on other matters. The eventual and rather remarkable, record held by No 77 Squadron, in the totality of 'things' Korean War, was not attained without considerable cost to RAAF pilots and aircraft.



No 77 Squadron flew around 19,000 individual sorties in all extremes of weather and, as history has already shown, in aircraft lacking the performance of the enemy's. It was for this latter reason, that their initial air-to-air role was converted to one of ground attack.

Australian fighter pilot casualties at the end of the conflict were:-

- 30 killed in action,
- 8 killed in flying accidents and
- 2 died as a result of accidents on the ground.

Korean War Casualties

British C'wealth

Killed in Action 1,263
Wounded 4,817

Other UN Allies

Killed in Action 1,800
Wounded 7,000

South Korea

Killed in Action 59,000
Wounded 291,000

United States

Killed in Action 33,651
Wounded 103,000
Missing 8,177
Prisoner of War 7,000

China and Korea (est) Killed in Action 500,000+ Wounded 1,000,000+

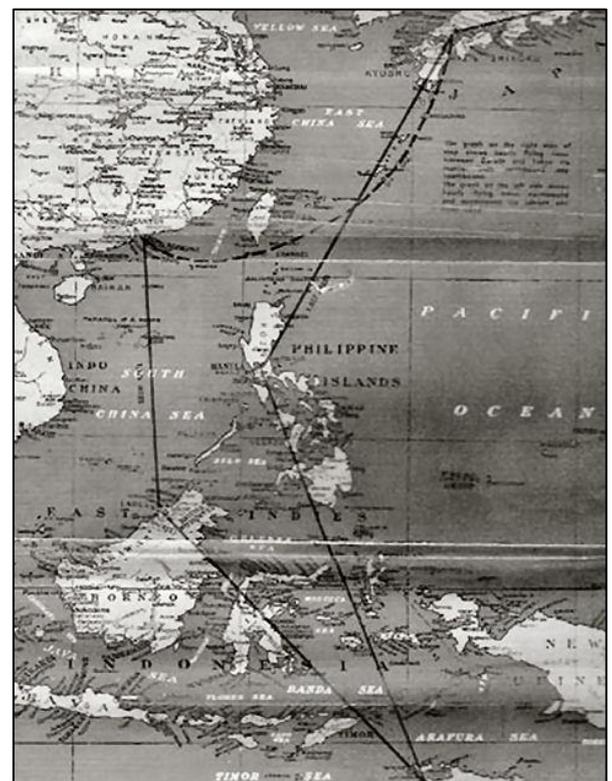
Additionally, 6 pilots survived capture as well as the treatment of the enemy during their period as prisoners of war. Aircraft losses were also extremely high, the Squadron losing 54 of their 90 Meteors during the period of the war.

So it is with the foregoing aspects of BCOF, together with the more thought-dwelling and sobering facts as shown immediately above, I need to now get back to my presence in Japan and my several temporary duty attachments to Korea, which, I must now confess, in the over-all picture, are indeed quite insignificant in the scheme of things. However, from a life-must-go-on viewpoint and on reflection since, as re-kindled through these pages, these times formed a quite significant part of my life in the RAAF.

So back to the story. I had reached Richmond as earlier mentioned, received my operational issue of equipment, comprising a whistle, a tin helmet and beautiful steel foot locker (trunk) which I still have, together with a lanyard.

[\(Back\)](#)

I still had a series of injections and vaccinations with which to contend. With a week-end intervening, I managed on the Saturday to get into Sydney with an intention of spending a few pleasant hours of down memory lane. I managed to fit-in a rld over to Manly and a feed of prawns on one of the already raved-about Manly ferries. Then on the Sunday I made it my business to gain a little more about the history of the Royal Australian Air Force by exploring the then rather



large RAAF Richmond which, like Laverton, was quite a delightful establishment still with pre-war grandeur. Monday morning dawned, along with it, the rather trepidatory prospect of arms being punctured and/or vaccinated. There were quite a lot of us thus requiring both a fairly lengthy queue together with the resultant long-wait for one's turn. At this point I am reminded of a joke that I heard when in this long queue and awaiting the various jabs etc and, which at this stage, should lighten-up my story?

A Jewish lady proceeding on a holiday from Sydney to Jerusalem had to undergo the necessary International Health vaccination process for Small Pox. Because of the rather ugly scar that this process caused in those days, she asked the Doctor:- where are you going to put the vacillation?, he replied you mean vaccination not vaccination, she then replied vacillation/ vaccination vot does it matter as long as you do it under the zucchini line, the doctor then said, you mean bikini don't you?, she then replied with some increasing dismay, zucchini/bikini, vot does it matter as long as I don't get the small cocks.

The next day and despite none of us feeling all that bright, we were whisked over to Mascot to join our Qantas Skymaster flight for Japan via, Darwin, Manila and thence to Iwakuni (three legs of 10 hours each). I seem to remember that Flt Lt Gordon Harvey (later shot down and taken prisoner in Korea), the then Sqn Ldr, Jim Morrison, of RAAF Medical service fame, was farewelling a colleague and a jockey-sized Navigator, Flt Lt Ivan Pretty, were on the same aeroplane as myself.

The ten hour flight to Darwin, was one of reflection for me together with a modicum of apprehensive consideration as to how I would settle in at Iwakuni which was, after all, an operational Base, situated in a close-by hostile Korean theatre of war. Also having lost an uncle, (Harry Hardy), in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp made me wonder as to whether my relations with the Japanese at Iwakuni in particular, or elsewhere in Japan would show an unhealthy prejudice? In the meantime, I did as the Qantas Captain suggested on the P.A, I sat back, I relaxed and I enjoyed the flight.

Whatever the standard of service on this lovely big Qantas Skymaster, being my first International flight and in fact only my third flight on a civil airline, anything would have been pretty good to me. But it was terrific, the complement of passengers, about 80, were mainly RAAF personnel. The meals were excellent and the cabin service quite attentive. Our flight to Darwin was right through the night, so there was nothing much to see. I found the tropical heat on the tarmac at Darwin not unlike that of Cairns. The next ten hours to Manila, although in daylight and other than for the Islands in the Arafura Sea, all we had to look at, out of the window, was the blankness of the South China Sea. On arrival at the Manila International Airport, disembarkation was again into the ambient temperature of a tropical night. We stayed overnight in the Manila Hotel, undoubtedly 5 star and to me the most salubrious place I had ever seen, let alone stayed in. There wasn't much staying though, after checking into my room, I headed down to the lobby, where I saw Ivan Pretty, to whom I'd already introduced myself earlier in the plane. He was having a drink with one of the civilian passengers who turned out to be the Australian General Manager of the Wheat and Barley board, who generously not only bought us a couple of drinks but also hired, what we would call today a limmo and we spent the next few hours looking at the sights of the city of Manila. Getting back to the hotel at about 2 a.m.

Following an early breakfast, out to the airport and off on our last leg to Iwakuni where we

arrived late afternoon landing at the RAAF Base. My first impressions were of a country lacking in colour. The Base had been a Japanese Naval Air Station during the war. There was still some evidence of this with one of the quite large hangars still showing signs of bomb-damage and disused for this reason. The hangars and other buildings on the Base were unpainted concrete or some of wooden structure and khaki in colour. There was little sign of either lawns or gardens except for spindly pine trees dotted here and there, I was met by my Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr Fred Bibby, who apologised that he would be away for the next few days, but said he would see again in a few days' time. He also intimated that they would look after me in the Sergeant's Mess and he told me that I would be working in the Cypher Office.

Because the Base was also the civil airport for Iwakuni and quite often civilian passengers stayed overnight, the RAAF Movement Control Office worked out of large building which they called The Transit Hotel, where incoming/outgoing, passengers both RAAF and civil personnel were processed by either the RAAF Movements staff, or by Qantas ground staff as appropriate.

Once cleared through the Transit Hotel, transport took two other senior NCO's and me to the Sergeants Mess where we were met by the Chairman of the Mess C'tee, a WOff George Oriole, who had been in Japan for the past five years. He was a Meteorological Observer. Japan was the only place in the RAAF where they were still used. He was single and more than happy to remain at Iwakuni where he also was undoubtedly a veritable King of the Castle. It was his custom to have new arrivals dine with him at the CMC's table on their first night and this procedure was extended to us which was a nice way to start out in this, what seemed to me, to be a quite strange environment and country. It even seemed stranger when I checked into my room, to find a room girl who had been allotted to me, both the Officers Mess and the Sergeants Mess provided a girl for each room and who acted as a house maid, laundress, seamstress and, in most cases as an interpreter too. I was told the Airmen's Mess had a similar arrangement, except there it was four to a room and a room-boy to each room, who did the same chores as the room-girls, only worked four times as hard.



Arriving Iwakuni ([Back](#))



Main entrance to Iwakuni. ([Back](#))

Alas, I was soon to find out that the equilibrium of this arrangement was very soon to be set off balance, the question of my being an acting Sergeant was about to rear its ugly head. I had risen early, unpacked and set about checking my bearings, then after breakfast made my way over to Headquarters to commence my inwards clearances. I then made, unbeknown to me, what turned out to be a really disastrous mistake.

My first port of call was to be the Base Squadron Orderly Room where I would commence the

process of clearing-in. The Orderly Room was on the second floor of the main administrative building which was also shared by the Base Headquarters staff. In making my way down the corridor I noted a large sign on one door, Flt Lt E.C. Grose, Wing Administrative Officer. He had been at A.G.R.S Ballarat and left for Japan a few months earlier than me. His door was open, I saw him seated at his desk and decided to go in and pay my respects. He looked up and said Hello Sarge, I'm pleased to see that you are still a Sergeant (knowing I'd held acting rank at Ballarat), when was your rank made substantive and congratulations anyway all in one breath.

Instead of keeping my secret to myself until I'd had a chance to talk to Sqn Ldr Bibby and being the rather honest lad that I'd always been I replied I'm still acting Sir, my posting signal said nothing to the contrary. To which he replied, you're not entitled to continue with acting rank once you leave the unit at which it was granted, so take it down. I couldn't believe my ears, the only thing he didn't do was offer me a pair of scissors to cut one stripe off each sleeve. Plucking up courage and telling a little bit of a fib, I said, sir, the matter is to be discussed with Sqn Ldr Bibby when he returns in a few days' time. One, Edwin Corvin Grose, his full name then said, it's got nothing to do with Sqn Ldr Bibby, he doesn't write the policy on acting rank, so I'm ordering you to go back to your room in the Sergeants Mess, take down the sergeant stripes and replace it with a Cpls arm-band and then move over to the Airmen's Mess.



Airman's Mess, Iwakuni. ([Back](#))

There was only one thing that prevented me from taking the matter any further with him and, that was that I had applied for a commission just before I left Ballarat and which I knew that Wing Commander Joe had recommended. So I did not want to do anything that might prejudice my future chances of commissioning. So off I went, tail between my legs and wishing I had never ever put in that application back in 1948 for a posting to Japan. To make matters even worse, as I was dragging my feet into the front door of the Sergeant's Mess, who should be coming out but George Oriole, who had already been contacted by Flt Lt Grose,

Instead of giving me a sympathetic ear and a fatherly pat on the head, he gave me the greatest tongue lashing of all time, interspersed with some quite colourful language, both in Japanese and English suggesting me to be an illegitimate imposter or words to that effect. With that, I gathered my belongings from the room, didn't even attempt to explain the situation to a

somewhat nonplussed room girl. I proceeded to L Group for a Corporals arm-band and can remember little of the rest of the day. I did however bewail the fact that had I not gone into Ned Grose's office, the matter would have been put right by Sqn Ldr Bibby, particularly as I was to later find out, there was one Sergeant short in the Section where I was going to be working.

So, having already arrived in Japan with a chip on the shoulder due to having to leave my little brl'd behind and now to make matters worse, on the day after arrival, losing my third stripe, with all its comfort's, measure of prestige and, more importantly, a third of my pay, the chip became something of a railway sleeper. My morale had been dented, as too had others mentioned earlier who ran into the no accompanying families policy. Fortunately and as I said earlier and with a war on our doorstep there was some quite earnest day-to-day work to be maintained, (and not a five day week either). Most of the base were on duty on Saturdays and quite a few Sundays. We, in the Signals empire were on duty every day of the week.

War damaged hanger. ([Back](#))

As well as work keeping us from being too pre-occupied with each of our individual and personal problems, the amenities and welfare activities on the Base were first class. A fantastic gymnasium and welfare (sports equipment etc) run by a then



Flg Off Thadeus (Ted) J Leach, a war-time wireless operator (later to become a WGCDR Admin). We also had an Olympic sized swimming pool, a football/cricket oval, albeit grass-less for most of the year and snow-covered in winter, a Salvation Army Recreation Hut complete with snack bar, an Australian Red Cross library facilities and a NAAFI (Naval, Army and Air Force Institute, same as our then Australian Canteen Service).

We had a small picture theatre, with films from Australia once each week, courtesy of Qantas and the ever-present US Navy ships anchored in the Air Base harbour, had all the latest movies from State-side which we also screened having eased ourselves into-the- loop so-to-speak. There was also the 77 Club which had been one of the premier Base attractions when 77 Sqn were operating out of Iwakuni. This Club continued with its popularity, despite 77 moving to Korea. The main Bingo night of the week, often had major prizes of large sums of money. With all these activities and no real desire, as yet anyway, to go off Base, I had not yet done any of the local touristy bits.

In fact, my first venture off-Base was associated with the Base Disaster Plan, although potential disasters were unlikely, there was the slight risk of air raids from Korea and the omnipresent typhoons, one of which occurred a few weeks before I arrived with bridges, buildings and service industries being badly hit. An integral part of this Plan was to have a mobile Base Squadron with which enabled quick dispersement away from any imminent danger of the contingencies mentioned. We had a series of 3 ton trucks, set-up as mobile specialist vehicles, i.e Wireless Section, Cypher Office, Pay Section and Orderly Room, Barracks Electrician, Light Engineering workshop etc. Each had its own driver and the vehicles had to be test-run every two weeks for a round trip distance of 50 miles. I was the driver for the Cypher Office truck and my first venture off the Base was to drive my truck on a 50 mile run. Traffic was not a problem, just as well too as the roads were bad and narrow. Even six years since the war's ending, very few Japanese had cars. Soon out in the country I saw a Japanese family in their paddy field

planting rice. Seeing me driving slowly past, they stood-up and bowed. I thought, why are they bowing to a bloody corporal.

So I stopped and walked as close to them as I could without getting my feet wet and then returned their bow. Although none of us could voice communicate, gesticulations were made, houses pointed to, hands lifted to mouths in drinking fashion and, within minutes, I was soon in their humble house sans shoes, sitting on the totami mat (straw floor) and sipping shyly, rather sickly luke warm tea. To this very day, I can still remember this rather humbling and strangely, satisfying human-relations experience. Something about which I had been told some years earlier concerning the truism that all persons, regardless of station in life at any one particular time, each have their own particular dignity to be respected. The occasion also told me that any prejudices related to my Uncle Harry's death, as a Japanese Prisoner of War were not likely to surface, nor did they for the 13 months I was in Japan.

Having broken the ice with regards to going off-Base, I then began the gift-shop-bit in the local village. Buying local artefacts, silks, kimonos for wives/girl friends etc. I also tripped away to Kure, Hiroshima and even to Tokyo, coinciding with the latter was a week spent at The Kawana Hotel, taken over by BCOF as an R & R Centre, on the Ito Peninsular and about 150 kms from Tokyo. The hotel with its two eighteen-hole golf courses, had been built in 1938/39 for the then scheduled 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, (the 1936 Games having been held in Hitler's Berlin,). The picture below speaks for itself concerning the grandeur of the place. Each Australian serving in BCOF was entitled to one week at Kawana at, I think, ten shillings a week (100 cents,) Of the many luxuries one could fit in during that week and one which pleased everybody, was the presence of fresh milk. Naturally, everyone also aspired to be a professional golfer by the end of seven days.



The Grandeur of the Kawana Hotel (Ito Peninsula Japan) ([Back](#))

Earlier, in this Section, I wrote about the rather tragic loss of life among the 77 Squadron pilots in Korea. It seemed rather strange that, similar to that Telegram boy in Warragul years earlier, I was again to be closely involved in the reporting of these deaths. In a different way this time

though being one of the persons in Japan receiving the signal from the Intelligence Officer in Korea, (Flt Lt Strath Park at the time) and re-transmitting to RAAF Headquarters in Australia, the particulars and circumstances of the pilot Killed (or lost) in Action.

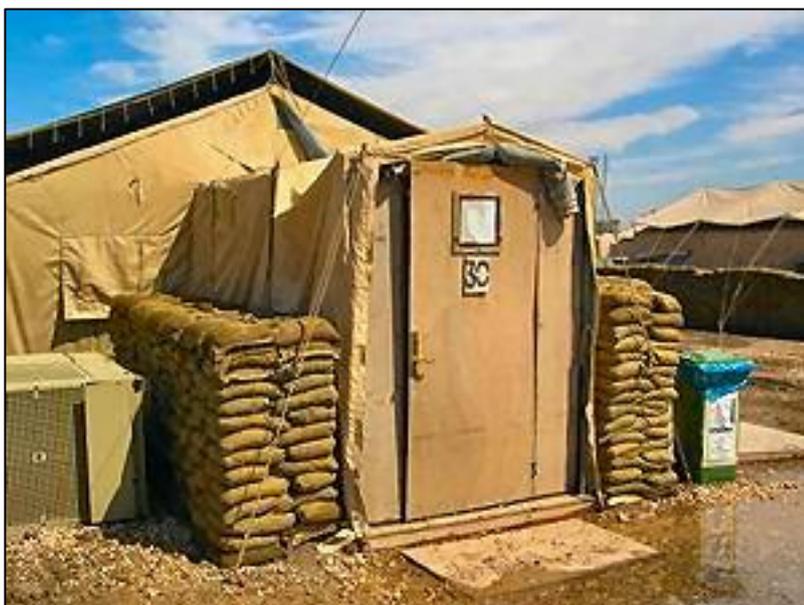
Each Telegraphist in the Signals Section at Iwakuni was also given the opportunity to do at least one trip to Korea in a 30 Comm Unit Dakota as supernumerary Wireless Operator, thus not only obtaining a first-hand understanding of what the Operational service personnel were experiencing, but also having the opportunity for a greater understanding of the bigger picture of the Korean War. I did two of these trips as well as two temporary duty assignments associated with the Iwakuni Welfare Committee. Each of my visits to Korea were in the depth of winter in the extremist of conditions. We used to transit through Pusan, where whilst waiting for unloading/loading, the crew of the aircraft would kick a football to keep warm.

The temporary duty visits usually meant a one or two night stay. Living quarters were large US Army tents, with half-boarded-up sides, each of which had a pot-belly stove which fought valiantly to keep the tent warm. One slept with one's boots on, not only to keep the feet warm but also to prevent the icing-up of the boots overnight. ([Back](#))



On each of my temporary duty visits I was accompanying two or three officers. I had my meals in the US army soldiers' mess hall, a huge marquee affair which seated some hundreds at each meal. At my first lunch time there, I joined the queue with the American airmen, Cafeteria style, with an indented tray, firstly soup would be poured into one corner then the main course in the

middle and sweets in the other corner. I can remember the menu being, pea and ham soup, harricot chops and veg, with apple pie and cream. All good stuff. There was a large condiment supply, pickles etc table adjoining, plus ice cream in large aluminium churns, a variety of flavours. I chose what looked like caramel. Not having ice-cream all that often in our Mess at Iwakuni, I took two rather large dollops which soon graced my apple pie and cream. I then noticed that my apparent greed, was a point of interest for those in my queue as well as close to the serving point. I chose a table on my own and began my meal. The nearer I got to eating my apple pie, the more American eyes seemed to be on me. I was soon to know the reason why, as I loaded up my dessert spoon, with apple pie, cream and then the caramel ice-cream. I then sensed that the ice-cream was a slightly different texture, to that of our ice- cream. I looked around and seemingly every eye in the Mess Hall was on me. I thought, maybe I am a guts for ice-cream but here goes, they can watch me as much as they like, The reason for their apparent sticky-beak-interest was, surprise, surprise, the caramel ice-cream was peanut-butter. I had our national reputation at stake, so I immediately pretended that I knew it was bloody peanut-butter and munched the lot with feigned relish. I imagine those Americans still talk about the strange Ozzie who liked lots of peanut butter on his apple pie. (I was as sick as a dog later and couldn't even look at peanut butter, for many years.). [\(Back\)](#)



I wasn't then and have never really been, a great boozer however, I was pretty much in the minority in the Airmens Mess at Iwakuni. I guess one of the reasons for this being that beer was cheap, Kirin I think was its name, brewed in Japan, instead I spent most of my leisure time writing letters to Mattee.



Friday in each week was a big day, the weekly Qantas flight would drop in with its usual swag of mail. It is hard to describe just how important was the letter from home. I was lucky Mattee used to write as often as me and lovely long letters with photos, news and of course plenty of terms of endearment too. Some poor fellows rarely got letters and would look on with envy when those more fortunate walked away from the mail call with a wad of letters in their hand. The weeks whizzed by when, and once again seemingly out of the blue, I had just ticked nine months off

the calendar, (now don't get ahead of me, Mattee hadn't given birth and she wasn't even pregnant,), when a signal came in from Australia posting me to Rathmines, (Lake Macquarie near Newcastle), for Officer pre-selection training. What a terrific surprise. Not only the great news about the officer training, albeit only pre-selection at this stage (more about this shortly) and not only having my Japan tour shortened by six months but

and the best of all, I was going home to my darling.

There was great excitement amongst my three room mates too as I had been wondering what had happened to the application I made for a commission before leaving Ballarat. I haven't mentioned my room-mates to this point. One a Cpl Bob Wilson (an H/F-D/F operator, a bit like George Oriole and his Meteorology mustering, there were no H/F-D/F (or hoof/doof as we used to call them) operator jobs with the RAAF in Australia. Japan was the only place where they were then used, so Bob had spent a number of years in Japan and spoke the language like a native. We became great friends then and later. The other two were a Cpl Gus Comer, (who was on my rookie course), his mustering Radio Mechanic and the fourth Cpl Ben Benzley, also a telegraphist like me. Our room boy Mori-Nakimura was not so pleased, it was a custom for them to give their boss-san a presento immediately prior to their return to Australia. This usually took the form of a beautiful Geisha doll in a glass-case. Their cost was about 3000 yen or three pounds in our money at that time. As Mori thought he still had six months budgeting to go for my presento he suddenly had to find the money sooner. (what everybody did in reality of course was at the time of the exchange of farewell presento's, the person going home would give his room-boy or in the case of a room-girl, 5000 yen in cash. However, there was never any suggestion that both presento exchanges were in any way linked. I had only two short weeks to sort myself out, last minute purchases which I had to bring forward, then the packing. [\(Back\)](#)



BACK TO AUSTRALIA, O.T.S RATHMINES, AUGUST 1952 [\(Back\)](#)

The first thing that happened to me, when reporting to the RAAF Movements people at the Iwakuni Transit Hotel for the Qantas travel arrangements to Australia, was an unexpected display of milk of human kindness from the Movements staff. They apologised, with a nod and a wink that they would have to book me on a Qantas flight a few days before my course at Rathmines was due to start and they hoped that I would be able to fill-in the intervening few days I said something about it being a bit of a nuisance, but I might take the opportunity to first go home to see my dear little bride.

All of the necessary paper work having been completed, I headed back to my room where our room-boy, Mori-san, queried me:- Ilton-san, izu Gauchu kaiedeimuska? (his question being when are you returning to Australia?). I replied that I was flying out in three day's time Looking a little crestfallen and doing some quick sums on his fingers, no doubt part of the calculations for the Geisha doll that he would be presenting to me on departure day, he then responded ichiban sayonara (number one goodbye party).

The next three days were a bit hectic, last minute shopping for presents back-home and at the same time deciding whether I would get all my gear into the allowable maximum of, which I seem to remember was 100 lbs. (anything that would not fit into that allowance would have to either follow by sea or be discarded). The Signals section arranged for a small sayonara party in my honour and then, before I knew, I was walking up the stair-way of the Qantas DC-4 with

my mind still in a bit of a whirl, conditioned by the still and considerable, disbelief that in 48 hours or so I'd be in the arms of my darling. Moreover, my tour had been shortened by three months, about which I had no real regrets. I was strengthened by the knowledge, that along with my compatriots in the Signals organisation at Iwakuni, our level of contribution to Base efficiency and support of our troops in Korea being quite creditable.

Given each of the various disadvantages that I have mentioned in the preceding few pages, I hasten to say that I was really quite pleased to have had the overall experience of a posting to Japan. Although primarily in an Occupation role, it also contained a war-time operational posture and involvement, which after all, is the very basis of national defence forces.

As I settled back in my seat, chewing the ubiquitous offering from the cabin staff, of anti-air-sickness barley sugar lollies, I again, began to muse on what was next. In order to fit this officer pre-selection business into some sort of context of the time, it is perhaps useful to, as I can with my now benefit of experience, relate more specifically the needs and the processes involved.

In the time-frame of which I am speaking, 1952, although WWII had been over for going on a decade, the post-war RAAF was seemingly still in a state of flux. The 1945-1947 effects of the almost maniacal speed with which the officer demobilisation policy had been handled, coupled with its seeming indiscriminate discarding of so many eminently suitable war-service officers, who had indicated a wish to serve on in the Permanent Air Force, did set the scene for some urgent re-thinking of the officer manning needs of the PAF. This urgency gathered further and unexpected, momentum with the onset of the Korean war in 1951. The resultant increased RAAF manning needs, particularly for officers in each of the Branches of the Officer establishment tables, not only set in motion the appointing of suitably qualified people from civvy street but also the commissioning process of selecting, (en masse), suitably qualified and motivated serving Airmen, NCO's and Warrant Officers. What then transpired and in order, to ensure adequate and undoubtedly additional scrutiny for officer potential, was a pre-selection process for further screening of the large number of Airmen Entrants seeking elevation to the commissioned ranks of the RAAF. An Airmen Entrant Pre-selection Course syllabus of 2 weeks was determined to meet these criteria.

An Officers Training School had recently been established at Rathmines on the shores of Lake Macquarie, which was only a few miles from Newcastle with the Pre-Selection Course process commencing in 1951. Although I am a little hazy on this, I do seem to remember that three Courses with about forty people or so would be run. From these a commissioning course, of about 25 people would be selected, to subsequently undergo a 16 week course. As earlier indicated, my being a bit of a whiz at mental arithmetic indicates, not only about a one in six chop rate but also, being selected at all was indeed more than competitive. This process was continued until the immediate short-term manning levels of the time, for RAAF officer appointments, were met.

The novel aspects of this policy were that for the duration of each pre-selection, students would live in and have all the privileges of, the Officers Mess. But would for the whole time, continue to wear their Airmen/NCO/WOff badges of rank. The only distinguishing feature being a white arm-band which shows in the photograph of my pre-selection course on the following page on which ranks are not readily discernible, except for Warrant Officer caps. However, all ranks from Aircraftsman to Warrant Officer are represented. The course totalled 44. It was the third Course of this particular series).The Syllabus embraced three broad aspects:-

- **Psychological Testing** (individual and collective), under the guidance and supervision of the then RAAF Chief Psychologist Mr Dick Want. (pieces of rope became life-lines for imaginary roaring torrents, 44 gallon drums became imaginary water-borne craft, sheets of newspaper became ground sheets etc etc. Initiative and innovation were the important and much-looked-for criteria.
- **Drill and Ceremonial**, the final test being each Course member acting as Parade commander and processing a particular Ceremonial movement from a drawing-out of the hat selection (see story on page 274.) and,
- **Administration, Customs of the Service, RAAF History.** Each of the above represented about 33% of the hectic and temperamentally-testing time for of each officer candidate.



Airman Entrant Officers Pre-selection Course. ([Back](#))

OFFICERS TRAINING SCHOOL RAAF BASE RATHMINES NSW, August 1952. ([Back](#))

Having removed some of the wraps from the possible ignorance and/or mysteries of the Airmen Entrant, Pre-selection for Officer Training processes, (the continuation of which will be further discussed a little later on), I should now get back to the return of the not so much prodigal son. This time but and more appropriately, of the love-lorne husband to his beautiful young brl'd Mattee, who had already surprised me by her decision to drive from Ballarat to Sydney to meet me at Mascot when my Qantas flight arrived. Of course this was without doubt the thought closest to my mind for the whole trip home, however, I did enjoy the highlight of our scheduled stop-over for a night in Hong Kong, one which almost did not eventuate because of the intervention of a typhoon which at one stage suggested a diversion to Manila. (Something that still sticks in my mind about our arrival at Kai Tak airport in Hong Kong, was the then necessity to close the gates across the main runway to preclude the normal hundreds of cyclists from becoming landing hazards). There was not much time for any sight-seeing however I made up for this during future visits in 1960, 1962 and again in 1982 and 1988. I cannot describe the

excitement and exhilaration I felt when I saw Mattee after clearing Customs, (I'd forgotten my attempts to grow a moustache which she quickly told me to shave off when she was wiping lipstick from around my mouth)

We stayed the night in the Hotel Sydney, (no longer in the Sydney hotel scene, but at the time was part of the Central Railway precinct). Mattee had never been to Canberra, (I had, during one of my weekends in Sydney, which I forgot to mention in that part of the narrative.). So we decided we would return to Melbourne via Canberra. In all we took three (quick) days on the journey home, followed by two seeming equally as quick days in Ballarat, after which I had to tear myself away and head for Rathmines and the process of hopeful pre-selection for further officer training. ([Back](#))



I must confess to some fear and trepidation about living in the Officers Mess when only a Corporal., (the closest I'd ever been to an Officers Mess before, other than the combined complex in Cairns, was when, as a rookies punishment I was walloping pots in the Officers Mess kitchen back at Laverton). This fear increased rapidly when on arrival at the Mess at Rathmines mid-Sunday afternoon and finding a need to ease the kidneys, I was just completing this process when the Commandant, Wg Cdr Conaghan, entered the porcelain area for a similar purpose. Looking me up and down he said without any other introductory remarks, in what was a rather gruff voice, I don't like your crew-cut, nor do I approve of embellished uniform badges (my BCOF badge had been done in a bullion style popular among the Japanese Gift Shop purveyors in Iwakuni). Over the succeeding fourteen days, I did not have much time to ponder the likely effect of my hair and dress irregularities; everything was so front on, however, I must say, the thing that did keep me going was my strong friendship with Len Brighton (then a WOff) whom I'd befriended during my recent three years at Ballarat. His quiet methodology did really inspire most us.

I guess one of the lighter moments of the course occurred during our final and fairly comprehensive drill examination. This included each pre-selection officer candidate having to put his Course mates through a particularly complicated drill manoeuvre, the nature of which depended on which card you drew from the Drill Instructor, Flt Lt McKewan, Mac as we all, quite affectionately called him when out of ear-shot, who when briefing us prior to the drill examination cautioned us not to be afraid, when out in front and in charge, to say as you were if appropriate.

One of our number, a Warrant Officer Clerk General, was hell bent on topping the course, which had to include doing the best of the group when taking a squad during the drill exam. The card that he selected from old Mac although we did not know it at the time, required him to get us into a position where he would then give the order (something like this), *at the halt, facing left, form close column*. A preamble to this movement was to bring us from *at ease* to *attention* thence, *turn to the right in column of route, right turn* followed with, *by the right quick march*. Well, for starters, he obviously wasn't too pleased with the promptness of our coming to *attention* so quickly barked, (several times), *AS YOU WERE*. Eventually he got us moving off in *column of route*. The direction we were taking on the Rathmines parade ground was towards

the lake which adjoined. Seemingly, having expended all of his vocal energy and Grenadier Guardsman type commands, the poor old officer-elect Warrant Officer froze on the spot. I was in the leading section of threes with then Warrant Officer Len Brighton and Flight Sergeant Bill Riggs. The three of us plus the remainder of the squad were quietly enjoying the dilemma of our acting Drill Instructor's. As we approached the shore of the lake, still in column of route, we three leading men were about to try taking off our shoes and socks and roll up our trousers, all whilst on the move in quick-time, when we heard poor old Mac scream out, *for crissakes Warrant Officer, say something even if it is only BON VOYAGE*



The conclusion of the rather draining two weeks, was not an appropriate occasion for celebratory drinks, dinner or the like. Everyone ceased their temporary duty attachment to O.T.S. and headed back to their home Bases, except, in my case, I did not have a home Base having been posted from Iwakuni. When questioning the Adjutant, Flt Lt Keith Roarty, as to my movements. he, having a similar sense of humour to that displayed by Flt Lt Grose of the acting sergeant saga, quickly advised me that I would be returning to Japan and to get on with it. This I did, but not without first managing a few more days at home in Ballarat, while waiting for a Qantas connection which happily, lasted for ten or so days. Then, with another long flight confronting me, Mattee said she would do as before and drive me to Melbourne. Sadly, just south of Bacchus Marsh, with me driving we encountered ice on the road and spun into a stationery truck. Our beautiful Vanguard was un-driveable. Arch Craig when contacted in Ballarat, agreed to arrange a tow back to Ballarat and to drive Mattee home. I hitched a lift to Melbourne in time to catch the appointed train and arrived back in Japan, via Manila again, 48 hours later. Even had my old room, with the same room mates and the same room boy. Poor old Mori-san who looked a little chastened wondering whether I would be in the market for another 3000 Yen geisha doll when I again went home.



Life resumed as before, another trip to Korea for a couple of days, also the regular test driving of the mobile cypher office, when I again visited my

tea-ceremony family. The Americans by this time had taken over the Iwakuni Base from the Australian government and had introduced all sorts of restrictions, including a no-swimming rule in the Base pool unless there were at least 2 Lifeguards present.

We also shared the Headquarters building with them. This leads to a rather amusing tale and which involved our mobile Electrician's shop and Corporal Barracks electrician driver who had a taste for the Kirin Beer of the day and had also found a convenient watering hole at an appropriate distance for the test driving of his mobile workshop.

He would take his fill of the said malt and hops and then return in his vehicle, whose home-going trek also suggested an equal propensity for the Kirin variety, On this particular occasion, when about a mile from the Base, the said Corporal having had some difficulty in maintaining a straight course, turned into the narrow local shopping-village street where shops were jammed together on both sides each with a common front veranda with supporting posts for the whole street length. The latter had provided in the past our Corporal with an appropriate nav-aid on which to steer. But and, predictably, through misjudging the first by about six inches the overhang of the truck managed to assuredly embrace every veranda post for the remainder of the village precinct. Our erstwhile driver untroubled by this domino effect of collapsing veranda roofs and screaming Poppa-sans and Mumma-sans, continued on his merry way. As already mentioned, the Base had recently been taken over by the US Air Force who were by this time its guardians, the keepers of the keys to gate etc and in their expected fashion, had handily placed, adjacent to the Guard Room, barbed wire barricades for likely four-wheeled intruders. One shop owning Poppa-san (old Japanese man) whose English was better than most of his neighbours, clamoured on the den-wa (Japanese for skin-and-bone, telephone) asked for the Guard Commander and reported the incident with considerable embellishment by saying mad Gauchu boy (Australian) is headed towards the Base in a speeding, drunken truck. The Guard Commander and his heavily armed helmeted MP's quickly put the barricades in position and their rifles to the ready (there was no mention of fixed bayonets,). In due course and in very short time, the mad Australian's drunken truck came into ziz-zagging view of the awaiting reception Committee.

Despite cries of who goes there, halt, stop, shinda shimai (drop dead), the charging vehicle not only broke through the barriers but left a considerable amount of the guard room in its wake. Our Corporal was arrested by the RAAF Service Police outside the Airmen's Mess and confined to barracks.

The most amusing part of this story concerns the subsequent Personnel Occurrence Report (P.O.R). The RAAF Wing HQ shared a Notice Board with the USAF Air Wing Notice Board in the combined HQ and the Americans had become quite intrigued by the RAAF type notices which appeared on the Board, not only Daily Routine Orders, DRO's, but those, to them anyway, funny POR's as well,

It was some days after the drunken vehicle escapade that the various aspects of it appeared in POR's under the Heading Punishments, Fines and Forfeitures, i.e Cpl., Barracks Electrician of Base Squadron RAAF Iwakuni is found guilty of (as many offences as you could think of, including failure to pay appropriate compliments to the officer of the Guard on entering the Base as well as Conduct Prejudicial to Good Order etc) and is awarded a Severe Reprimand and stoppages of pay to offset damages that occurred to several Japanese Nationals in their role of shopkeepers. These POR's caused more merriment among the Americans than any

previous, not so much for the heinous crimes but even more so for the following page in the said POR's where Honours, Awards and Increments of Pay were also listed. Would you know, on this very page, there again appeared the name of one Cpl. Barracks Elec etc with being awarded the Good Conduct Increment. (The Japanese Clerks who did all the typing did not see any connection with the Corporal's escapades and the promulgation of the Good Conduct Increment.)

My unexpected return to Japan also provided opportunities for a number of photo-shoots which I had not done, some of which are on the next page.



The 1952 RAAF Iwakuni (Japan) Australian Rules Football team. [\(Back\)](#)



*FltLt Ned Grose, F/O Ted Leach Cpl Ted Ilton
On the tarmac, Pusan Korea. Sep 1952.*

[\(Back\)](#)



*Ted outside 77 Sqn Crew Room
RAAF Kimpo Korea, Sep 1952. ([Back](#))*

Although having settled-down to the completion of my tour in Japan and rejoicing in the fact that I'd had an unexpected trip home, coupled with the joys of being reunited with Mattee, there was still the uncertainty of my success or otherwise with the pre-selection for commission process. The only advice we had been given in this regard at the conclusion of the fourteen days, was that the sorting-out process would take some time. An indication of success would only be when postings were being made to an actual Officer Training Course and which should happen before the end of the year (1952). So all I could do was to sit and wait and to continue doing the Japan things that I had originally planned. One of which had been to visit

the Hiroshima site, a couple of hours train journey from Iwakuni. This opportunity presented itself when Bob Wilson offered to accompany me. I was quite apprehensive as to how I would feel when actually standing in the midst of the happening, six years having elapsed. I did not expect to see a still ravaged and desolate landscape, however, I was surprised none-the-less to see a city virtually rebuilt. The only visible reminder being the Bomb Dome. It was our proximity to the latter, when the mental horror picture was immediately painted on my mind. I just wanted to catch the first train back to Iwakuni and that's exactly what we did. (Bob had seen it several times before and was hardened).



*The mental horror
picture. ([Back](#))*

At the other end of the scale were the obvious beauty spots both horticultural, architectural and

of human kind. Some examples of which I have included below, with some of the picture-post cards that I acquired along the way.

Additionally and the final Japanese view from a camera lens was taken at the popular local week-end retreat at Miyajima on the Inland sea, in which is the back-ground of the Tori-gate, a Shinto religious symbol and probably as much photographed as the Sydney Harbour Bridge.



Cpl Ted with three other members of the Base Signals Staff A farewell visit to Miyajima, Dec 1952.
[\(Back\)](#)





An activity which, like so many others of my RAAF career, came out of the blue after my return from Australia, was a facility to talk to my dearly beloved via Ham Radio. And, would you believe, as regularly as one night per week for about one hour. I had befriended a US Navy Chief Petty Officer and learned that he was a Ham Radio fan and, in fact, operated his outfit from the local USN Hobby precinct, (just alongside the Picture Theatre). I told him, that a mate of mine in Ballarat Australia was also a Ham and that he, Mattee and I used to play tennis together. He asked me for his call-sign so that he could try to contact him. This he duly did and, almost straight away, made contact. My mate then arranged for Mattee to be in his radio shack at an appointed time each week, when she and I would converse. Unfortunately, it could not be like an ordinary phone conversation. I would say something then over, she would reply then over and I would say something again etc. This was no problem until one morning I was walking through Headquarters, when my C.O Wg Cdr Keith Hennock said, Ilton I would like you



to know that the whole Base won't be able to sleep until you decide on what colour your bloody motor-car should be painted.

We couldn't agree on a colour.

I was a bit bewildered until he explained that the sound system in the theatre the previous evening had broken-down and in its place emitted feed- back from the Ham radio next door and that our entire conversation come through loud and clear to the bemused theatre audience. Most, as I heard later, agreed that our parlaying was more entertaining than the stalled movie. (You will recall my earlier mention of an

accident with our Vanguard on an icy road? Well, as a re-paint was included in the repairs we did at the time agree to change the original maroon but could not agree on a colour).

During the few months when I was back in Japan, my Uncle Bill, (you remember the Squadron Leader Accountant Officer, who was also at Iwakuni while I was there), acted very much as my mentor with regards to things commissioning. One piece of advice he gave me was to have a mess dress uniform made, Japanese tailors being superb, together with the cloth that they used and the price was about four times as cheap as in Australia. I was somewhat reticent, not wanting to appear so over presumptuous as to be purchasing officer's uniforms. His response to this being there is no need to have any rank affixed and, if I did miss out, I would have no problems selling it to an officer with similar measurements to me. So with that, I had one made. (I still have it after 52 years, it has been altered a few times and I still wear it to RAAF functions where formal attire for retired officers is appropriate). The uniform business must have been some form of harbinger for movement in the commission-waiting business. The day after the Mess uniform was delivered to me (9th December 1952), carefully wrapped in a plain wrapper, a signal came out posting me to Base Sqn RAAF Laverton for leave until further posting advice was given. Even this did not confirm anything about the commissioning Course. However, I was going home three months earlier than tour-expire-date. And this might be to have me on-hand for the Course when my leave expired. I was soon on a repeat performance of my August journey, but this time via Manila, Then by train from Sydney to Ballarat. Mattee's work, this time, precluded her from driving up to Sydney. It was great to be home, particularly so close to Christmas with a swag of leave to cut out.

One disappointing factor and which to me was almost the end of the world, Len Brighton rang me on Christmas Eve to say he had been posted to OTS Rathmines w.e.f. 12th January. I had told him I heard nothing about my fortunes.

He indicated that he had heard that others had also received their posting orders for Rathmines I really had to sweat-it-out until, would you believe, 7th January when the following telegram arrived:-

OFFICERS' TRAINING SCHOOL, RAAF RATHMINES 12TH JANUARY 1953 - 30TH MARCH 1953 [\(Back\)](#)

What was about to unfold for me, was indeed something of a zenith in my life. There was never any question of my resolve and ambition for a life in the Royal Australian Air Force, although and initially with pilot's wings as part of this ambition and for which subsequent barriers meant a denial. I did not because of this, in any way, lose my goal of an Airforce career, however and quite frankly, with only a partly completed third year in High School, any career advancement into commissioned ranks in the Air Force had seemed to be out of my reach. On the other hand and as outlined earlier, the posting to Ballarat did open other doors for a change in direction as to professional speciality and career advancement. Up until then, just being a competent telegraphist coupled with my associated limited education, seemed to preclude me from any such prospects. My flukey employment at AGRS Ballarat in a more than busy Headquarters Orderly Room with its accompanying Organisation, Administrative and Personnel Management characteristics, undoubtedly widened my reachable horizons. Accordingly, when applications for commissions were invited in 1950 I thought there might be a chance for me in the only category to which I had some now proven natural leanings that being, in the Administrative category of the Special Duties Branch.

Sch. C. 6589 8/1951		This Telegram has been received subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. The time received at this office is shown at the end of the message.		COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.		The date stamp indicates the date of reception and lodgment also, unless an earlier date is shown after the time of lodgment.		Office Date Stamp	
TELEGRAM								T. C. 7 JAN 53 BALLARAT	
Chl. No.	Office of Origin.	No. of Words.	Time of Lodgment.						
X149...	MELBOURNE #	41/40	11-23A RETURNED FROM RAAF BALLARAT		1-55P				
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REPLY PAID... A32330 CPL ILTON									
A E 243 HUMFFRAY ST NORTH BALLARAT									
REQUEST YOU REPORT THIS UNIT 0800 HOURS 12 JAN STOP YOU ARE POSTED									
TO OTS TO UNDERGO OFFICERS TRAINING COURSE STOP ACKNOWLEDGE									
... ADJUTANT BASE SQUADRON LAVERTON									
(A32330.ILTON A E 243 0800 12 OTS)									

Telegram OTS Posting

[\(Back\)](#)

The RAAF powers that be must have had similar thoughts as evidenced by my posting to Rathmines to commence officer training with an attendant successful graduation move into SD Admin. However, this was still another sixteen weeks away with lots of things needing to go my way before I could replace my (fading) Corporal stripes with the skinny but pulsating braid of a Pilot Officer. (the pilot bit only refers to the most junior officer rank in the RAAF, it does not infer that flying of aeroplanes is part of the rank). While speaking of RAAF officer ranks and before my treatise on our officer course at Rathmines, perhaps it would now be useful, in the narrative, to trace the evolving commissioned officer pilot species from the first World War up to the era to which this account refers i.e the 1970's.

Given that the first military pilots were in fact inducted from serving army officers, their military ranks of Lieutenant, Captain and even perhaps Major, were continued to be worn. In these initial stages the only aircrew category was in fact that of pilot. However, the second category of Observer, quickly evolved. The Flying brevets, to distinguish the two and which were worn at that time, were the double pilot's wing and a half wing for Observers, they too, were army officers and, in the main, had specialised as artillery officers. As this flying element of the Army quickly developed into a self-contained Unit, (Flying Corps), with appropriate support personnel, the Army pilots and observers had to, as an organisational necessity, adopt the dual role of unit executives. They became known as general duties officers. The advent of the Royal Air Force towards the end of 1914-18 war brought with it a new rank structure peculiar to the Air Force, the title for each not necessarily inferring that the wearer was also part of aircrew.



The ranks adopted and still in use today, Pilot Officer, Flying Officer, Flight Lieutenant, Squadron Leader, Wing Commander, Group Captain, Air Commodore, Air Vice-Marshal, Air Marshal and Air Chief Marshal. At the time of its inauguration, the first RAF officers were, almost to a man, qualified pilots and thus the prefix to the rank was symbolic of their varying experience levels. The novice pilot, having just received his wings, was a Pilot Officer. One with twelve months experience became a Flying Officer who after three years became a Flight Lieutenant commanding a flight of up to four aeroplanes. The Squadron Leader commanded a squadron of two or more flights and the Wing Commander two or more Squadrons. Two or more Wings became a group and thus the rank of Group Captain. Ranks above Group Captain became known as Air rank officers who occupied the top echelon positions within the Air Force. Then with a rapidly increasing need for a mix of aviation specialists at an officer management level, Branches and Categories were formed. Aircrew became the General Duties Branch, the non-flying were titled Technical, Equipment and Administration/Special Duties branches.

**RAAF RATHMINES, THE COMMISSIONING COURSE AT LAST
12TH JANUARY TO 30TH MARCH, 1953. ([Back](#))**

Due to its generic origins and a culture where the aircrew officers, right from the beginning, held the executive positions in the Flying Corps, the culture transcended into the future and greatly expanded organisation of an Air Force where senior command and staff officer posts were invariably established with an annotation for General Duties officers.

The RAAF followed this same system when formed in 1921 and it remained so until the end of the second world war when, with the newly formed Permanent Air Force structure, the non-flying branches were further identified as follows:-

- Technical Branch:** EngAero, Radio, Transport, Electrical, Instruments and Armament.
- Equipment Branch:** Supply and Works.
- Special Duties Branch:** Administration, Air Traffic Control, Provost, Intelligence, Photographic, Education and Physical Training.
- Medical Branch:** Doctors, Dentists, Pharmacists, Nursing, Radiologists and Hygiene
- Accounting and Chaplaincy Branches.**

**No 7 Officers Training Course, RAAF Base Rathmines.
12th January - 30th March, 1953**



Back Row L-R: F/O's Paternoster, Potter, Henze, Cpl Ilton, Sgt Warnock, WO Pupty, WO Mahoney, LAC Wheal F/O Dawson, WO Callinan,

Third Row L-R: Sgt Riggs, LAC Goodley, Sgt O'Donoghue, WO's Townsend, Wishart, Sgt Mann, Cpl Bernasconi, Sgt's Malone, Ryan.

Second Row L-R: F/O Cumes, WO's Murray, Cameron, Robertson. F/O Ford, Fltlt Thrum, Sgt Rhodes, W0 Brighton, LAC Hazel

Front Row L-R: P/O Henderson, WO Brown, F/O Podger, P/O Crough, F/O's Hansen, Black, WO's Chaplin, Geddes, P/O Cahill. (Absent F/O's Davies, Foley, Stewart and W/0 Furlonger)

N.B:- The Course total was 40 people comprising 15 already commissioned officers and 25 airmen entrants.

It was not until nearing the end of the twentieth century, that the RAAF created a General List for all officers of Group Captain rank and above. With this came the demise of the (until then) exclusive establishment table notation General Duties officers (only?). The change was a long overdue recognition and did eventually address the aggregated and long-term discriminatory resentment that excluded senior non-GD officers from occupying most of the senior RAAF executive posts.

Whilst the latter General List relaxation provisions did not apply during the period of this narrative, there were, even then in our eyes, a number of non-GD leadership aspirants on our commissioning Course whose potential then showed. And, who in fact, did gain one star rank before their retirement and who most successfully managed the responsibilities of senior executive command positions.



RAAF FLYING BOAT BASE, RATHMINES, Lake Macquarie (World War II) ([Back](#))

Lennie Brighton and I had travelled up to Rathmines from Ballarat by train and I think the alighting station for the RAAF Base was a small town called Fassifern. Whilst both our recollections of our six months earlier visitation were somewhat clouded with anguish, we did remember the beauty of the locale and were at least looking forward to that part of the exercise. The Base itself owed its genesis to the early pre-WWII decision of the Australian Government to acquire a large number of Catalinas from the United States, (the total number by the end of the war being in the vicinity of 170). Flying Boat bases (depots) as well as Rathmines were established at Lake Boga in Victoria and at Bowen in Queensland, the latter two being disbanded soon after the end of the war. Rathmines continued as a flying boat base until 1950 when the last of the Catalinas were withdrawn from service. The Base was then structured for some airmen engineering training, recruit training, training of National Servicemen and then the Officers Training School was formed in 1951. Six commissioning courses had been conducted prior to our arrival on 13th January 1953. Of the 41 on our Course, as you will note from the photograph, 25 of us were the survivors of the 120 or so pre-selectee's who were put through their pre-selection paces in mid-1952. The other 16 were commissioned straight from 'civvy street and were required to undergo officer training.

The latter mix also created a peculiarly un-RAAF situation, where nearly half the Course by rights should have been addressed as sir by the non-commissioned Course members. The more practical situation was that for the 16 week duration of the course, we were all treated as commissioned officers. The Commandant, whom I mentioned earlier, Wing Commander Connaghan, went to great lengths to make sure that this did happen. We all gained a considerable amount of respect for this man and I am sure each of us would have been deeply saddened when a year or two later he was killed in an aircraft accident whilst on exchange in Britain with the Royal Air Force. There is little doubt that he was heading for bigger things in the RAAF. His leadership qualities were a fine example for each of us to emulate during our subsequent careers.

Before leaving this what seemed then and still seems to me now 50 years later, the anathema of the unfortunate duality of non-commissioned personnel living in the Officers Mess, calling fellow commissioned officer students by their Christian names etc prompts the seeking-out the validity of, or rather, the basis for, the practice in the first place. The logic behind this system could well have been associated with the contractual basis of an airman's period of engagement. Should he fail the commissioning course he could then immediately be reverted to his former position as a RAAF airman, return to his previous Unit and resume his normal employment, (taking with him the possible stigma of failure, perhaps somewhat more embarrassing for the senior NCO/WOff not to mention also the potentially lessening of the disciplinary powers therewith attached). As far as we affected students were concerned, the system did ensure that we, at no time, lost sight of the carrot of commissioning. We were in no doubt that failure to measure up in any situation required of the course syllabus could result in the granting of the Queen's Commission going out of the veritable window. The process therefore guaranteed a constant keeping of the nose to the grindstone. In the event, the system for commissioning did change to one of an interview chain processing, Section Commander, Squadron Commander, Commanding Officer and then the Commissioning Board. A commission would then be granted followed by an Officer Training Course as before. Human nature being what it is, this system did not compromise the previous carrot effect. Firstly, on being commissioned, the appointee would be discharged from the terms of his engagement as an airman.

The spur then for successfully completing the Officers Course with the consequent validating of the Commission was again in itself an appropriate incentive to do one's best and therefore keep one's new job. I do apologise for this departure from the intent of this narrative, but and as it is no doubt obvious from the foregoing, it had been a bit of a bee in the bonnet for me for a long time and something which I aired on many an occasion later on, when a DS at OTS in 1965 I was able compare the more logical and agreeable changed system of airmen commissioning to the duck's breakfast for the former.

Earlier in this narrative, when we visited Rathmines I did not spend much time in describing the general aspects of the place in terms of comfort, convenience or what have you.

My first reaction, as already touched upon, was that the general lakeside environment was one of peace and beauty with touches of the good old Aussie bush, lots of gum trees and wattles. The buildings, although pretty much the war-time, but weatherboard instead of tin, style, except for the sea-plane hangar which was quite huge and something of a magnificent structure and indeed, the centre-piece of the Base. (It was subsequently, from what I heard, partly dismantled in sections and water-barged to RAAF Richmond where it was re-assembled and became a permanent part of the hangar space of that Base). The Officers Mess although not an architectural master-piece was quite pleasant and comfortable, with a spacious front veranda overlooking the lake, where the daily stand-down (and de-tensing) ale was very much enjoyed. It was here also where we were required to put into practice the knife and fork/customs of the Service bit, under the ever-watchful eye of members of the Directing Staff. Not forgetting the careful tutoring of our Course Mother, a Flt Lt Vic Cannon (whose posting to Rathmines must have been a real-down-to-earth experience having come from flying Mustangs/Meteors around Mig-alley along the 38th Parallel in Korea).



The old Officers' Mess, now the Rathmines Memorial Bowling Club.

Our sleeping quarters were in comfortably fitted out huts, with a reasonably spacious single-

room configuration which also served as a study. Our working days consisted of about 60% lecture room activities with Administration, Air Force Law, Man Management, History of the RAAF, Lecture Technique and Public Speaking. The remaining 40% was taken-up with marching up and down the main road of the Base with the accompanying drill and ceremonial on the parade ground. Being summer-time, this particular activity became quite trying and exhausting most of the time. Whilst on the subject of Lecture Technique, which was taken by the Commandant and, at his first lecture, stressing the importance of avoiding distractive mannerisms i.e. pacing up and down on the rostrum, umming and ahing, tossing a stick of chalk in the air, pulling on one's tie, running hands through the hair, picking one's nose and even scratching one's rear. too much of any of these he said and you'll lose your audience. By coincidence, immediately following this lecture, we had an address by a psychologist from the New England University, a Mr Selby Allie and would you believe, during his 40 minute address, he constantly did all of these things. But his delivery was so good and his subject so interesting, that we didn't miss a word. The Commandant who was sitting at the rear must have wondered about the relevance of his earlier precautionary words.

Lectures were interspersed with examinations at various stages of syllabus completion. A mark out of 100% was awarded for each examination and it was expected that a minimum overall assessment of 70% had to be attained for each exam as insurance for a successful graduation. A final drill exam, similar as for the pre-selection course, was also conducted and took place during the final two weeks. We spent the day before Graduation at beach-side Morna Point, adjacent to the RAAF's fighter Base at Williamtown, where there was also the tri-Service School of Land and Air Warfare which conducted courses for Senior Officers. A climax to this Course was a fire-power demonstration by low-flying Vampire aircraft strafing targets along the beach. Our bus was held-up with traffic on the way across from Rathmines and Vic Cannon was becoming a bit agitated, as our arrival time at Morna Point was timed to be about 30 minutes before the firing started. In the event, the Vampires were circling when we arrived and we had to rush across to the seating which had been arranged for our party. Air Cdre Knox-Knight, OC Williamtown at the time, (with a somewhat gruff and garrulous reputation), was in a W/T (wireless telegraphy) tender with a plexi-domed observation hatch, from which he could direct the fighters as required. He saw us dashing along the sand-dunes and was taken aback because of a likely compromise to the assembled senior officers viewing platform. One of our number, WOff Don Cameron, one of the hardest working and conscientious members of our course, saw this Vampire seemingly heading straight towards him, he stopped transfixed in his tracks.

The Air Cdre who was not impressed, jumped out of the W/T tender and screamed at Don; who are you and where did you come from and what's that bloody white arm-band doing on your sleeve. Poor old Don, quite overwhelmed by this out-burst, then muttered I'm WOff Cameron sir, an officer cadet from Rathmines, we have just arrived in our bus over there, pointing over the sand-dunes. The Air Cdre roared at him, you were an officer cadet you mean, now double-back to your bus and stay there, your Commandant will hear more of this. Most of us witnessed and heard this and we did really feel for poor old Don for the rest of the day. I think Vic Cannon figured he would try to smooth the waters with the Air Cdre after the fire power demonstration was over, however, such an opportunity did not present itself. The atmosphere in the bus trip back to Rathmines was indeed one of silent anticipation as to what was going to happen to poor old Don who was in a state of panic. Vic assured him that he would take the case up with the Commandant as soon as we got back to Rathmines. In the event Wg Cdr Connaghan when acquainted with the dilemma, rang the Air Cdre and managed to right the situation.

As a strange twist to the whole affair, it was our Graduation Dinner in the Mess next evening, to which we learned the Air Cdre had been invited as Guest of Honour. And, talk about poetic justice, we were assembling for the dinner the next evening, I mistimed my visit to relieve my bladder and was last into the dining-room where by this time everyone else was already standing behind their chair in the candle-lit room. The tables were configured in a U shape with a top table where all the officer staff were standing, together with the Commandant and Air Cdre Knox- Knight. The Commandant called out Plt Off Ilton, please move quickly up here to the top table (where I noted was only one chair, with no-one standing behind). My face had reddened, with every eye upon me as I very self-consciously hurried to the vacant chair, alongside which, would you believe, stood the said Air Cdre, who leaned towards me with a slight smile on his face and said quietly to me from the corner of his mouth bloody bad luck old man. But he was a delightful dinner companion who seemed to go out of his way to be kind to the brand new Flying Officer Cameron.

His efforts in this regard were very much in evidence when introduced to the gathering by the Commandant, the Air Cdre said something along the lines of, good evening Gentlemen, I consider it an honour and a privilege to be here this evening, on the occasion of this Graduation Dinner celebrating your commissioning. I hope to meet with some of you after dinner. You will already be aware that I was introduced to Cameron at Morna Point yesterday where we shared differing points of view about the wrong place at the wrong time, (This created some perhaps slightly nervous laughter around the room, but did bury what had previously appeared to be doomsday for poor old Don Cameron.).

At this point I should digress by recapping the activities of the previous few days. Following the final drill exams, it was then a fairly safe bet that we had all passed, particularly when we were despatched to L Group for issue of our officer uniform, including leather gloves, embossed officers cap badge and other accoutrements which became part of an officer's issue entitlement. Commandant interviews then followed, with over-all assessment decisions being discussed.



With the impending issue of our posting instructions, I realise I have not mentioned herein my career change dilemma. As it transpired during our commissioning course, the Federal Government announced all sorts of budget cuts, including some affecting the Defence Forces. One of the latter, which also directly affected me, occasioned my being called before the Commandant to be advised that commissioning into the Special Duties Administrative Branch had been put on hold until further notice and Cpl Ilton is therefore to be given the option of transferring to Technical (Radio) or resuming normal duties as a Corporal Telegraphy instructor duties at Ballarat. Despite my lack of knowledge/experience in matters technical I knew that there was only one option for me and not wanting to miss my commissioning, I quickly advised this choice to the Commandant and would worry about gaining the right technical knowledge after my graduation.

I don't think that there was anything particularly portentous about the fact that we were leaving Rathmines on April Fool's Day, I was joining fourteen other Technical officers from the Course,

each of us heading for the RAAF School of Technical Training at Wagga Wagga to be part of No 1 Specialist Officers Engineering Course. The remaining 26 graduates proceeded by various means to a variety of RAAF Bases throughout Australia. A succession of courses was going to be my lot for eighteen months or so, Wagga for about nine and then back to Ballarat for a Radio Officers Course for most of 1954. I must confess to being, at this point in time, proud of my achieving commissioned rank, again and due to my lack of academic achievement, I dared not hope to proceed beyond Flight Lieutenant or Squadron Leader. I do hasten to say such a level of achievement would have seemed perfectly acceptable to me. The sixteen weeks that we had just completed at Rathmines was very much front-on although there were sufficient diversions to keep us relatively sane. We spent most weekends in Newcastle, staying at a typical, at the time, workingman's class Hotel. We were led to it by its relatively cheap tariff and the knowledge that it was a favourite of Commercial Travellers who usually judged a hostelry by the standard of its table, i.e good food in a good dining-room.

***Course Graduation Day", 30th March 1953
No 7 Officers Training Course, RAAF Base Rathmines
(12th January- 30th March 1953)***



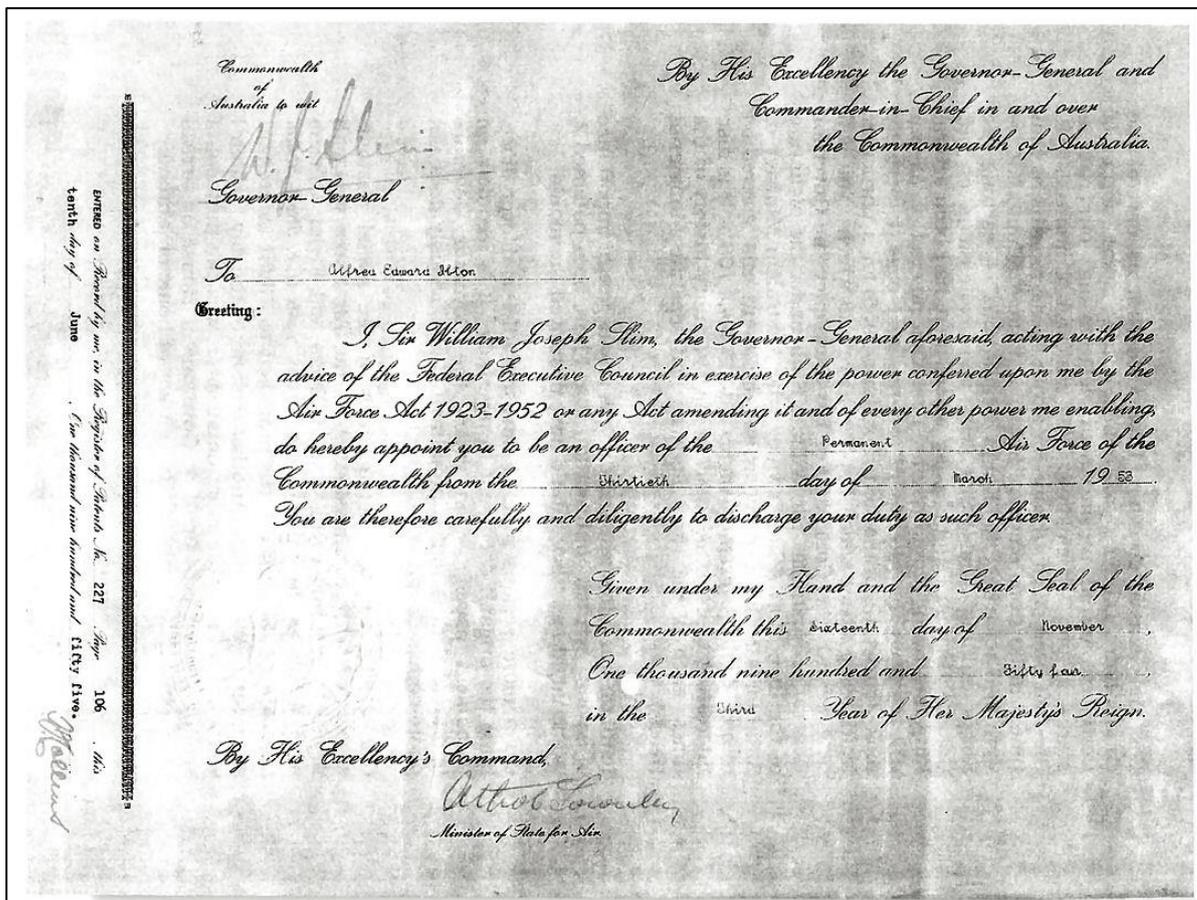
Back 3 (L-R): F/O Hansen, P/O's Bernasconi, Warnock,
Next 5 (L-R): F/O's Cumes, WI Shart, P/O Wheal , F/O's Anderson, Donoghue
Middle Row (L-R): F/O's Cahill, Davies, Geddes, P/O's Henderson, Crough, Murray, F/O Potter, P/O's Hazel, Malone, F/O Robertson P/O Riggs (part hidden), F/O's Cameron, Chaplin, Ford, P/O's Mann, Ryan, Stewart, F/O's Foster, Puxty, Callinan, Black, Townsend, Brown, Foley.
Front Row (L-R): F/O's Mahoney, Brighton, Dawson, Furlonger, P/O's Ilton, Rhodes, Paternoster, F/O's Podger and Henze.

N.B. The Course total was 41 comprising 16 already commissioned direct-entry officers and 25 airmen entrants. Officer Branches represented:- Technical 19. Air Traffic Control 9 ,Equip 4, Admin 2, Accts 2, Works 2. Legal 2 and Photo 1.

Those of us who were so inclined could also spend some time in the surf at one of the

Newcastle beaches. We occasionally fished in the Lake and also did the odd boat trip thereon. The RAAF still operated a part-time Marine Section to service the odd flying boat that occasionally dropped in and some of the marine craft were ideal for Lake boating. Also and as mentioned earlier, the Commandant, Wg Cdr Connaghan, did occasionally fly the PBY5-A Catalina still on the books at Rathmines. He took our whole Course on a flight in batches of 8 nor 10. I found it almost incongruous to see this Cat being handled by one Pilot and a WOff Engineer, when it had taken a crew of 8 in the those in which I flew whilst in Cairns. I will never forget the experience and perhaps the historical fact that we were the last serving RAAF members to fly in a Cat at Rathmines.

For some reason or other, I expected that as part of the Graduation Dinner programme, that some form of Certificate would have been presented legitimising our rise in status to one of holding Her Majesty's Commission. The Queen had been on the throne for about twelve months at that time, although from habit, I must admit that we were still referring to King's Regulations, earning the King's shilling and other long-held expressions of our Colonial/British Empire past where there had been several Kings bestowing commissions in the post-Victoria era. As you will see from the document below, it actually took fourteen months (tenth of June 1955) for a particular legitimising about which I spoke above and which you will note was at the Command of His Excellency the Governor General of Australia, Sir William Slim, and also under the signature of the then Hon Athol Townley the Australian Minister of State for Air who also noted that this event was *entered on record in the Register of Patents No 227 page 106.* (it is also interesting that, as a part of Parliamentary history at that time, each of the three Services had separate Ministerial heads). [\(Back\)](#)



I still do not know whether there is any degree of importance of having written confirmation that I had been patented? (some might say they should have destroyed the mould).

On a more serious note, I have proudly and ever since, hung the original document in my study. It is recorded on parchment paper, on which the Governor General's imprinted Seal is quite prominent (but obviously does not photo-copy).

One of the strange incongruities of the social customs associated with commissioning in the Air Force was, that with regard to visiting cards, Pilot Officers and Flying Officers were shown as **Mr.** In my case, I was: **Mr A. E. Ilton, Royal Australian Air Force** until I was promoted to Flight Lieutenant some three years later. Another custom of the day, which I will go into in a little more detail later, was the protocol of signing the Visitors Book at Government House on arrival on a posting to a capital city, either at home or abroad.

**No 1 Specialist (Basic) Engineering Officers Course
April 1953- November 1953.
RAAF WAGGA WAGGA NSW**



Back Row (L-R): P/O Hazel, F/O's Brighton, Donoghue, P/O Bernasconi, W/O Ewing (staff) F/O Mahoney, P/O's Warnock, Henderson.

Middle Row (L-R): Sgt's Younger, Heazlewood (staff), F/O Wishart, WgCdr Taylor (Chief Instructor) P/O's Malone, Ryan, F/O Robertson.

Front Row (L-R): P/O's Stewart, Wheal, Ilton, Rhodes.

[\(Back\)](#)

THE WAGGA DAYS. ([Back](#))

The inland city of Wagga Wagga is one of Australia's largest regional cities and is located on the Murrumbidgee River in the South East corner of New South Wales. Settled first in 1849, it has become known as the gateway to the Riverina Region renowned for its continuing rich agricultural appeal. Wagga Wagga is an aboriginal word meaning a place of many crows. It was in 1940 that RAAF Forest Hill, (at Wagga Wagga), was established by the Australian Government and which soon became a place of many aeroplanes. The primary role of the Base at that time being to provide a Service Flying Training School (No 2), followed by No 31 Squadron's arrival (Beaufighters) also in 1942, and in the same year No 2 Operational Training Unit was formed. Even some discarded RAF Fairey Battles found their way to be a part of RAAF Wagga's aircraft inventory.



ex-RAF Fairey Battles at Wagga. (thought to be about 1940)? ([Back](#))

All of this had of course changed by 1954, when we 14 brand new graduates arrived from Officers Training School at Rathmines. Because of the need at the end of WWII for literally hundreds of war-time RAAF establishments to be closed, the future utilisation for the RAAF facilities, including the airfield at the then Forest Hill area of Wagga Wagga, needed also to be determined. The immediate post-war planning emphasis for the RAAF, among other things, included a perceived need for a centrally and established area for technical training, but unlike other Bases closing down because of their flying role redundancy, a RAAF presence at Wagga could be retained with a primary role of ground technical training, (other than Radio which became a function of the new School of Radio). This was not only for the many and varied adult technical trade requirements but and even more particularly, also for the planned annual intake commencing in 1948, of several hundred engineering apprentices. In fact when we arrived in 1954, the first three annual apprentice intakes had already completed their four year courses of training. The Base by this time was a well-established and most efficient entity.

Non-technical courses had also been mounted, for such musterings as Cooks and Cooks Assistants, Clerks and Stores Hands, Recruit training and, for a time, National Service training. We were the first Engineering Officers course, but there had been other officer courses for Lecture Technique, Engineering Admin etc. I cannot remember the extent of the Base uniformed population when we were there, but it could have been upwards of 1500. Today (2004) the Apprentice scheme no longer exists, neither is Messing mustering training part of the curricular activities. However, the technical, now more appropriately termed engineering, mustering requirements are still constant and of considerable magnitude. A decision was also made to keep the airfield operational, both for feeder airline and general aviation requirements as well as for the convenience of RAAF aircraft operations when tasked. The extent of Air Traffic Control, ground support equipment etc, was probably only the bare minimum?

As I have been going through the various re-call motions for reproducing this work, events and happenings of, now, some fifty years ago are not being recalled with all that much ease. I am now ruing the day that I did not keep a diary, even if only in the style of some jottings as memory prompts. However, this was not done so I have had to rely on my memory and, in many cases, the photographs and/or documents that have become something of an aid de memoire. I am so glad that I kept so many of these not, mind you, for any hidden agenda in respect of book writing, but mainly because I am a sentimentalist from way back. And, as my dear Mattee often reminded me, you must have been bitten by a Bower bird when you were young, the way you collect and keep, every little thing. I must say thus far, I have been reasonably confident that, with the aid of these various memorabilia, that, the chronicle remains reasonably accurate in thought, deed and time.



So continuing on in this vein, I seem to recall that we proceeded en masse (14 of us) to Wagga for our next scheduled training course. I also seem to remember that it was the week before Easter when we would then have an opportunity to head to our various homes for four or five

days. Part of our arrival plan was locked-in to our Joining Instructions which had also invited each of us to be present in the ante-room of the officers mess at Wagga for Sunday morning-tea, at 1000 hours. Although an invitation, being newly commissioned and wanting to start on the right foot, we took this as a command performance. This was particularly appropriate too, as our host, Wg Cdr Rex Taylor (a pre-war engineer of the Permanent Air Force), was not only temporary Base OC but also the Chief Instructor of the establishment. I also recall that we were to be in our best blues, gloves etc. Not that any of us needed much coaching for the wearing of this attire as we were still proudly wanting to display our new rank at every occasion. (we did stop short of sewing the braid on to our singlets or pyjamas). So, we duly arrived and presented ourselves and, to a man, recognised an officer and complete gentleman in one Wg Cdr Rex Taylor who did so make us feel completely welcome. Moreover, contrary to the practice that we had just experienced for the past three months at OTS, we weren't required for morning parades, we didn't start lectures until 0900 and there would not be a requirement to sit for exams, either in periodic stages or at the end of the course. Furthermore, we would be free to go on leave each week-end from 1500 hours on Friday afternoons. The actual number of weeks of instruction required had been determined from our engineering back-ground in the RAAF. About 50% were only required for the first four months. The remainder, (except Brian Bernasconi and me, both being Telegraphists with no technical back-ground at all), had to do an additional month. Brian and I had to stay on until just before Christmas.

After a most pleasant morning tea, the Wing Commander bid us adieu until the morrow. We were then asked to accompany the three or four NCO stewards to our quarters adjacent to the Mess. One of the Corporals sought my bags and then asked me to follow him. This led us past the boiler room, just at the rear of the Mess from where I noticed a WOff (the senior Boiler Attendant) come to the door and call out Corporal. I immediately jumped to attention called out yes sir and hurried to his side. He spotted me and my skinny Plt Off braid and no doubt was wondering whether I had gone off my head, when I suddenly remembered my new status and that he had only been trying to gain the attention of the Cpl steward for some reason or other. He then, being something of an old shell-back, apologised for any inconvenience sir, to which I uttered a not at all Warrant Officer and continued on my way although with embarrassment still covering not only my face but the rest of my body too.

I was most impressed with the standard of the bed-rooms in the Mess - although as already mentioned above, the Wagga Base being one of WWII construction, the Mess and, as we soon discovered, many of the other buildings, were obviously of post-war construction and design and really looked good.

A number of hangars and workshops seemed to have either been made-over, or perhaps were also in the ranks of the new.

The friendship between Lennie Brighton and myself, which started at Ballarat back in 1948, had strengthened considerably during the recent closer-bonding of our 16 weeks common-purpose at Rathmines. His wife Josie, was back in Ballarat to where we both headed for the Easter weekend. While back home, I thought I would take the opportunity of sorting out a few of my personal things that I could make use of during my extended time at Wagga. Mattee suggested that I take the car back with me thus making it easier to convey the extra baggage. Len took the same opportunity, the plan being to return the car to Ballarat the following weekend. This we duly did and, on the following Friday afternoon, agreed to take a couple of our Course mates with us, who wanted to go to Melbourne to where I did not mind the diversion from the more

direct route, which would have been across to Bendigo, from around about Seymour, a saving of quite a few miles. In the event en route to Melbourne, our two passengers suggested that if we were happy to do this every weekend they would pay for the petrol. The idea appealed to both Lenand and me as expected, also to both Jocie and Mattee, (neither of whom really had a need for a car during the week).

So for the rest of the time at Wagga and for even the last few weeks, when I was the only one of the Course remaining, the long week-end trek, (some 700 miles) continued. Departing just after 1500 hours and arriving at Ballarat just before midnight, with the reverse happening on the way back. Quite a number of the Wagga staff did something similar and each had a car load. I remember one Sunday night, we used to catch up with Flt Lt Alan Moore's car around about Wangaratta, who drove a small Morris (1600) to and from Melbourne. In those days and at that time of night it would be unusual to see more than one or two cars between Melbourne and Albury and then none between Albury and Wagga. On this occasion, we saw, up ahead, just near Benalla, two sets of tail-lights close together. As we got closer we could see that it was Alan Moore being towed by a car not much bigger than his and obviously, by their slow speed, were making heavy weather of it. We pulled well ahead then stopped and flagged them down. The driver of the towing vehicle was unknown to Alan or us, just a good Samaritan. Obviously, though who wanted relief from the tow. The Vanguard, which I was driving, some readers will remember, was fitted with an originally designed for the Ferguson tractor. I had no doubts of its ability to tow Alan's Morris, so I agreed to tow him into Wangaratta where he assured me there would be an all-night garage where he could at least safely leave it, (his diagnosis of the problem being a piston up through the head.). Whilst I was not aware of any over-night garages this side of Albury I did take him at his word.

In the event there was not a thing open anywhere this side of the Murray or for that matter in Albury either, so I finished towing him all the way to RAAF Wagga. To say that by this time Alan Moore's eye-balls were hanging out on his cheeks would be no over statement. Len Brighton often said to me it might be one for the Guinness Book of Records.

Looking back on those times, the Base at Wagga was no doubt a great place for us to test our officer legs. There were few occasions when we had to make any executive decision of any kind. With such a large trainee population there was an equally large, in proportion, number of officers which provided us with a real good mix and indeed, some future conduits for companion-ship and professional pollination. The Officer Commanding, also a pre-war PAF officer, Group Captain Harvey-Smith encouraged not only Mess social activities but also the proper indoctrination for newly commissioned officers. The Mess President, Sqn Ldr Sandy Sinclair, was like a second father to us. Dining-in Nights were a regular occurrence, where I had my first opportunity to wear my Japanese made Mess Kit. These were also occasions for bidding farewell to staff officers proceeding on posting. If going northwards, it was not unusual for the departing officer, that very night, to be catching the Sydney train which came through Wagga sometime after mid-night. Any people looking out the window and watching passengers joining the train, might well be startled to see a group of RAAF officers, of various ranks and ages and all in formal Mess kit, farewelling one of their own into a sleeping car, who would also be in his Mess Kit and still wearing his miniature medals.

In speaking about various events during our time at Wagga, two rather memorable occasions did occur not long after we arrived, one being the Queen's Coronation on 2nd June 1953 and then, a few months later, a rather spectacular and tragic air crash over the Wagga airfield.

As to the former, I am sure that it would be safe to say that the occasion was being celebrated in all parts of the British Commonwealth, by way of dinners, parades, garden parties formal balls etc. The latter no doubt in the preponderance, if the Officers Mess at RAAF Wagga was any indication for which planning had been well underway weeks before we arrived. So, soon after our arrival, we determined the logistics associated with distant wives attending, including available local hostelry accommodation. Fortunately I was able [\(Back\)](#)



to book Mattee, (who travelled up by train), into Romano's Hotel, one of the more popular Wagga hotels at the time. (even ensured that beds were suitably pre-warmed each winter's night with hot water bottles). Selected RAAF aircraft which had been relegated to the RSTT Ground Instructional Aids Inventory, were given a spit and polish and towed up to flood-lit lawn positions at the Officers Mess. Being the first formal Officers Ball that Mattee and I had attended, coupled with the Regal *raison-d-etre* for the occasion, made it something for us to remember. The climax of the evening being the wonderful festive board. Again this, except for the formal dinner at Rathmines with its excellent food, was the first of many dozens of occasions during our RAAF involvement where we were indeed privileged to enjoy such magnificent catering and dedicated messing staff.

The second memorable occasion also and most paradoxically, had its genesis from a special social celebration but, which and most sadly, ended in tragedy rather than joy. Although it happened 50 years ago, it still remains as one of my most vivid and sad, memories of Wagga. It would not have been long after the Royal Ball and was during one of the few weekends that

Len and I did not head Ballarat-wards. What we had noticed though, over the previous couple of weeks, when heading to Ballarat at about 3 pm on a Friday afternoon, was a Navy Sea Fury aircraft on its approach to land at the RAAF airfield, Being bits of sticky-beaks we found out that the pilot, a Navy Commander and CO of the RAN Air Station at Nowra, had been courting a lady doctor who had a practice in Wagga and that these flights across to Wagga



concerned final wedding preparations. Presumably they were tasked in conjunction with the Commander's allotted cross-country flying hours programme. [\(Back\)](#)

The particular weekend was one when our remaining at the Base, happened to coincide with this wedding in which an Honour Guard of Squadron pilots were taking part. They too flew over with their Sea Furys and Fireflies, 8 in total, probably and again, combining the trip with a programmed Squadron Cross-Country exercise. The wedding took place as scheduled on the Saturday afternoon. With the exception of the deputy Squadron Commander (a Lt Cdr and former RAAF DFC Sqn Ldr) the other pilots attended a social evening at the Army Officers Mess at Kapooka (a few miles from Wagga Wagga). The LtCdr joined Lenny Brighton and I for dinner at our Wagga Mess and afterwards, a game or two of snooker. He told us of the flight plan for the next day being a mid-morning en masse departure for Nowra. We asked him of the

likelihood of a low fly-over after take-off (not an unusual procedure in those days), he replied in the negative, merely saying, as part of their departure they would form up into stepped-up echelon, fly over Kapooka and then set-off for Nowra. Having a car at my disposal and keen to watch these Navy aeroplanes unfold their wings and then depart, I offered to drive him down to the tarmac next morning which he readily accepted. Lenny and I as arranged, drove him down to the tarmac, walked over to his aircraft with him, made our goodbyes/good lucks and headed back to the car to watch their departure on this beautiful morning.

They duly became airborne, formed up into formation and headed in the general direction of Kapooka. Lenny and I, with a Flt Lt McDermott, who was Orderly Officer, were about to get into the car, when Lenny said hey, we might as well wait a minute, its seems they've changed their minds and they are heading back our way. And indeed, this they were, in seeming tight formation too and probably at about 1500 feet. It was then that the three of us noticed two Tiger Moths some distance from us taxiing out on to the grassed area of the airfield obviously in preparation for take-off.

As mentioned earlier, the Base was not established for Air Traffic Control activities. The local Aero Club, to which these Tiger Moths belonged and among whose trainees, were quite a few RAAF apprentices, were no doubt conditioned to a no other aircraft traffic situation, particularly at weekends. Accordingly, arrival and departure procedures were confined to the mark one eye-ball. There is little doubt, in our minds, to this day, that on this particular occasion there would have been obvious signs of the Navy's departure programme, once becoming airborne and out of the circuit they would expect to see the last of them. With this timing in mind, whether or not the mark-one eye-balls were as sharp as might have been required, one Tiger Moth was seen and heard, making take-off noises and then to our horror, climbed straight up into the midst of the Naval aircraft formation which broke off, seemingly, in all directions. The Tiger Moth disintegrated, our recollection being the front section, including the cockpits and a portion of the wings still intact. Also, seemingly, it fluttered to the ground like a falling leaf crashing in the middle of the airfield. To our complete surprise, we noted a figure clamber out of the aircraft, we also noted a Sea Fury rapidly losing height, although still in one piece, heading un-erringly to a paddock on the airfield boundary for, our presumption, of a crash-landing, There being no fire-crew available and the only ambulance at the Station sick-quarters, we quickly drove there to raise the alarm. However, they had already been alerted and had proceeded to the crash site, where on arrival they removed the body of the pilot from the wrecked aircraft. What saddened me even more was to learn that it was the Lt Cdr we'd befriended and had seen off only a few minutes earlier.

We never did hear, or see, anything officially concerning any other details of this crash. It did appear that a controlled crash-landing attempt had been denied due to the pilot's severe head injuries from the mid-air collision? Although well-known on the Base at the time, that Len Brighton and I were eye-witnesses to this mid-air collision, we were not called to give our eye-witness account. The RAAF Apprentice in the Tiger Moth who, we believe, suffered only a broken collar bone, stayed on and was eventually commissioned as an Engineer with subsequent retirement as a Wing Commander.

Oddly enough, during our time at Wagga, we did hear of another mid-air collision involving, in 1940, two Ansons from Wagga's No 2 SFTS. The aircraft were flying together on a training exercise at about 1000 feet when the trainee (LAC) pilots lost sight of each other. One aircraft then descended on the one beneath and both became an inextricable jamming together.

Apparently, the 2 occupants of the lower aircraft safely bailed out after the collision. The pilot of the upper aircraft (whose name was Fuller) and which still had power, managed to force-land the piggy-backing aircraft without injury to either he or his Observer, or without adding much more aircraft damage.

The Piggy-backing Avro Ansons, RAAF WAGGA 1940
([Back](#))



An odd twist to this rather remarkable affair involves the pilot Fuller who, having completed a tour of European bomber-operations returned to Australia to be a flying instructor at RAAF East Sale where, one morning when riding his bicycle to work, he sadly, was run-over and killed by a bus.

With the passing of the Wagga Coronation Ball and with Lennie and I returning our Brides to Ballarat in one of our long car rides on the following week-end, the instructional programme then continued without too much excitement. I was learning to be an Engineering Officer, but there was a distinct absence of hands-on activity. Also a complete absence of anything remotely Radio (still to come at Ballarat). The closest that we got to any hands-on was the shaping, with a Bastard 10 inch file, of a rectangular piece of six by four inch steel into what was dubiously called a tomb-stone. From this we were to adduce something of bench-work and the use of basic tools, micrometers etc, not forgetting the ethics and safety features of workshop practice and hygiene. So for a few weeks I guess, we were learning and performing some early aspects of fitting and turning.

At the same time, we had classes on (engineer) man-management with emphasis on the importance of time management efficiency as well as the safety aspects of an aircraft maintenance line. The secrets and mysteries were disclosed of RMI's, (Routine Maintenance Instructions), Forms E/E77 Pre-flight Hangar Maintenance certification, (or yes sir, I'm sure she'll fly sir) and ABO's T, (Air Board Orders Technical)). All good stuff, as the saying goes, for an indoctrination into the world of grease-guns, aircraft engines, airframes and technical personnel. As I also indicated a few pages back, one of the more important parts of the whole period spent at Wagga was the daily contact with a wide variety of RAAF Engineers. Not only in the lecture room, workshop, hangar or whatever, but also in that most relevant environment of Officers Mess living, where a yarn over a beer after work/dinner, provided an irreplaceable exposure for soaking-up the culture and customs of the Service. The resultant confident expectation of being better able to acquit one-self as a competent Air Force officer and (eventual) specialist was also re-assuring. Although, it was with little or no reluctance when I did move on, given the natural urge to get on with the next bit of training, I did however, reflect on some of the good vibes of Wagga Wagga.



The Beautiful and Natural Botanical Gardens. (City of Wagga Wagga)



School of Radio - Ballarat [\(Back\)](#)

No 1 Initial Specialist Officers Radio Course
November '1953 - May 1954

These were a most eventful six months with matters Training-front, the Home-front, even the Car-front and climaxing with a posting back to Laverton, where for the first time since joining the Air Force, I would be earning an honest shilling, instead of being paid for sitting on my butt in a class-room for the previous 18 months. I should mention at the outset that Wg Cdr Joe Reynolds was no longer in command however, the mention of his name does bring back a retro-event by way of the 1951 Royal Tour which I forgot to mention earlier. An omission which I will now correct by digressing from the current chronology.

The Royal Tour was that involving of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Phillip and I seem to recall that Ballarat was the first Australian inland city on the Royal tour itinerary. I am not sure of the date though, except that it was in 1951. The Ballarat RAAF camp was tasked with providing Guards of Honour at both the Railway Station and the Town Hall, with smaller complements of troops for street-lining from the Station to the Town Hall. Wing Commander Joe still held his accustomed close rein out at the camp. Constant drill-training had become the order of the day and I well remember the morning before the actual arrival of the Royal couple. [\(Back\)](#) We were



all assembled on the parade ground for a final inspection by the Wg Cdr. I happened to be Orderly Sergeant. The procedure at that time being the Orderly Officer and the Orderly Sergeant would accompany the CO on his inspection and take notes concerning any defaulters and as directed by him. He was taking a lot of time with this inspection, forgetting perhaps, that he was due at the Town Hall for briefing at 1000 hours. To ensure a quick get-away from the inspection parade, his staff car and driver were parked at the parade ground entrance. A matter of mistaken head-dress then raised its head and would later become Joe Reynolds folk-lore among other gems that were being pasted away in hats (pardon the puns).

Germaine to this particular story, was a dress policy where caps were issued only to Officers, W/O's and Drivers. All other ranks had to wear the untidy forage cap, which no matter how worn always looked too rakish. The exception being that an airman could be authorised to wear a peak cap if he held a medical chit for an eye problem. There was one airman on parade that morning who had an eye problem and was as a result, wearing a peaked cap. He also had another problem, he had not cleaned his shoes. Wg Cdr Joe's eye for detail did not miss this omission and growled:- you haven't cleaned your ruddy, (he never swore), shoes, now double back to your quarters, clean them properly and then report back to me, right here. The lad dashed off and the inspection continued. Meanwhile, the CO's driver, with the time approaching 0915, was concerned about being late for the Mayoral appointment. He dared not sound the car horn, but thought he could quietly walk over to the parade ground, gain the attention of the CO and remind him of the time. (a very brave man, many in the know would be saying.).

He, whom you might remember, being a Driver and so was wearing a peaked cap, surreptitiously moved towards the CO but before I could intervene on his behalf, he coughed twice and Joe turned around, spotted the peaked cap, looked down at the (Driver's) shoes and then roared, you still haven't cleaned those ruddy shoes, double back to your ruddy hut and clean them again. The poor old driver was but but butting, like a two-stroke engine, when Joe shouted move it at him, who when about to do the doubling back bit, the previous miscreant returned. Joe quickly realising his mistaken identity, looked at his watch and immediately handed over the parade to his deputy. Together with his still startled driver, headed quickly for the Mayoral appointment. Two days later, again on the parade ground, the C.O espoused his pride in us all. Towards the end of 1954 he was posted to be C.O of the RAAF's Telecom Unit where I would once more serve with him and, where more stories of his ways of management, would again emanate (generally though from those who perhaps needed special management anyway).

Now, let's go forward again to the Ballarat of 1953 where we had settled into our previous routine. Badminton had ceased but tennis was in. Also something far more important, at the time, than routines of the camp was Mattee bringing home the news from a visit to her Doctor that she was pregnant. Somehow or other, it was not something I had really been thinking about. I guess, in a way, the broken home environment from which I had come, with not a lot of mixing with other families and where there would be the likely constant of babies being born to one family or another, I had not really been conditioned to family expectations of my own. Mattee and I had discussed it of course and we had a family planning programme of no children for the first three years. So in that regard we were up to speed. Once the news sunk in I was highly delighted and quietly hoped for a son the first time around. So, Mattee's knitting needles started clicking quite busily. She had always been a magnificent knitter, forever making us jumpers, cardigans etc (even socks and gloves). I still wear some jumpers that she made all those years ago.

My training schedule at Ballarat was not going to be for as long as first planned, which meant a posting late April early May. This fact would give us time to make confinement arrangements at our new locale which both of us hoped would be in Melbourne. The training programme had been reasonably relaxed from a pressure viewpoint but, it was hard for me to relax, mainly due to the requirement to learn the fundamentals of radio and electricity theory. This did not happen, I was one of a Course of about 12 officers, 25% of whom were Science graduates from University and the remainder commissioned airmen from technical musterings. Although I managed to pass the various stages of the Course, it was due more to my parrot fashion learning system rather than from any real understanding of the topic. (I still thought that OHMS meant On Her Majesty's Service and not a Unit of electrical resistance.). The net result of all this, was not only my continuing lack of technical knowledge but also a distressing loss of confidence and hope.

I hasten to mention at this stage, the remarkable uniqueness of the RAAF Ballarat training experience being so similar to that of RAAF Wagga. I refer to my continuing good fortune as a new Pilot Officer in meeting, as with Engineering officers, a lot of Radio officers, (many of whom I had already encountered in my original 3 years at Ballarat as an NCO), who were also to become not only comrades but would provide the mentor support so necessary for the lifting of my quite low morale at that time. School of Radio RAAF Ballarat, by its very nature, frequently attracted large numbers (individually or in groups), of Radio Officers, either on Refresher courses, Project programmes, Staff visits etc. Most of them were then senior Radio officers. Many were from the pre-war Permanent Air Force as airmen entrants and were graduates of the 1930's Signals Schools either in Melbourne or at (my beloved) Point Cook. Names that at this moment jump out of the woodwork and with their ranks at the time, Sqn Ldr McBride, Sqn Ldr Thorogood, Sqn Ldr O'Neill, Sqn Ldr Edwards. Sqn Ldr Cooper, Sqn Ldr Ritchie, Sqn Ldr Moore, Sqn Ldr Austin, Sqn Ldr Smith, Sqn Ldr Reid, Sqn Ldr McCarthy, Sqn Ldr Amor, Sqn Ldr Robb, Sqn Ldr Hall, Sqn Ldr Tyler, Sqn Ldr Walker, Sqn Ldr Brennan and others whose names at the moment escape me but who also helped me along the way. Most of those mentioned became Wing Commanders, some Group Captains and at least two Air Commodores.

Now to make further mention of the car-front as foreshadowed at the beginning of this segment.

Well, by coincidence, the Chief Instructor at the time, Sqn Ldr Poppa Jack Brennan owned a beautiful shiny black Mk IV Jaguar. It was alleged at the time, that he pampered the car to the extent that he drained the radiator on frosty nights, (that would have been nearly every night in the winter at Ballarat). I fell in love with this car and touched it tenderly quite often when it dignified, with its very presence, the Officers Mess car-park. Then suddenly it disappeared from the scene, me being a mere Plt Off did not have the temerity to enquire of its fate, but I must confess to wondering what had happened to it. I soon knew. ([Back](#))



Which also concerns our Vanguard and about which you are probably still wondering what colour we eventually agreed upon, well we did change it from maroon to iridescent blue. Now and yet another coincidence, we were, as was our Saturday night custom, parking outside the Ballarat Theatre and lo and behold there, in all its splendour was the Mk IV Jag. After the

pictures, we spotted Les Wall, the theatre manager, admiring our Vanguard. He enquired whether we were interested in selling. The answer of course was no, although by now a couple of years old it was still as new, particularly with the new paint job. Les then pointed to the Jag and said he had recently purchased it from a Squadron Leader out at the camp, with the intention of pulling his caravan. However, because it was reasonably low to the ground it had not proved satisfactory as a towing medium. He did know about the good power reputation of the Vanguard, (I was not about to tell him that it already held a car-towing record) and he enquired whether we would be interested in a swop with two hundred pounds his way. I didn't think I should appear too eager, so took a couple of slow breaths before saying yes. This was quickly seconded by Mattee. This beautiful car then, with all its wonderful wood panelling, plush carpets, pig skin seats, chrome, copper plumbing, huge headlights, sunshine roof (and even push-button radio) did give us lots of comfort and lots of pleasure. Although and jumping ahead a bit in my story, we eventually sold it twelve months later to a Sqn Ldr (Radio Officer) Geoff Svenson, but more of that later.

Our beautiful Jaguar and me, April 1954
([Back](#))

In the preceding couple of pages, I did spend some time discussing my Radio training, (or lack of it). Of course at the same time there were veritably dozens



of other Radio (Radar) oriented courses being undertaken at Ballarat, one being a re-incarnation of the old WWII WAG category (but sans the Air Gunnery bit.). Some of the latter stayed in the RAAF after WWII and performed an air-crew role as wireless operators and additionally, a considerable number of these were still senior NCO's. Quite a few others had re-enlisted in the PAF but in ground mustering, (Sel Williams from my recruit course being one). In 1950 the new aircrew category of Signaller began and which included the half-wing brevet and its central S motif. The first Course graduated in January 1951. A subsequent Signallers Refresher Course was also conducted in the 1950's. Also with this new aircrew category began a coincident change of the accustomed and traditional senior NCO ranks of Sgt, F.Sgt and W.Off., which changed to Pilot 1, 2 or 3, Navigator and Signaller 1, 2 and 3. An aircrew W.Off became a Master Pilot, Navigator or Signaller. ([Back](#))



This change was, at the time, became too much like slavish adoption of anything RAF, most of which though and thankfully, had usually been practical as well as sensible. However and in the case under discussion, neither of the latter applied. A both-sleeve patch of a Laurel wreath firstly denoted that the wearer as being aircrew. Then the succeeding and most confusing, efficiency grades/rank within the category were centralised in the laurel wreath, e.g. an empty laurel wreath denoted aircrew trainee, with a lone star, one who was the already abinitio trained, with two stars, the equivalent rank of Sgt, with three stars and a brevet, equivalent F.Sgt rank (see an example in the photo below). There was no expected logical progression for a W.Off of four stars, The traditional galloping horse rank emblem of a W.Off appeared instead. Fortunately the RAAF discontinued this star system within 2 years and subsequently NCO Signallers were made redundant, Signallers became Air Electronic Officers and coupled with this, the grant of an automatic commission.



*No 1 Signaller Refresher Course-
School of Radio, mid-1950's*

NB:- The only two that I could put a name too are:

Rear row, far right,Bill Hurman later a Supply Officer. Front row, far left, Sel Williams.

Now and before leaving this section of the narrative some further Ballarat happenings. Firstly, back at the camp, Wg Cdr Alec Slight had taken over as CO (from Wg Cdr Joe) a much more amenable person, with a different, (brotherly almost), management style. To illustrate this point, he had two extremely predominant upper front teeth. A comment of discussion one night in the bar, when the CO was being discussed with the newly arrived (dentist) Flt Lt Tim Orr who had been interviewed by the CO that same day, said in a rather loud and flippant tone. I'll bet the CO could eat an apple through a rabbit-proof fence. Imagine the surprise (and shock) on Tim Orr's face, when Alec Slight, who had just quietly walked in to the bar, said in a loud voice "How much do you want to bet Tim?. The moment was saved by the smile on the CO's face, perhaps evidence of new methods of management. Joe would have eaten Tim Orr for breakfast.

Another very humorous occasion a few weeks later was a celebratory unveiling in the Officers Mess of a RAAF Central Welfare Committee Shield honouring the then Senior Admin Officer, Sqn Ldr Harry Cleghorn, for contributions made to the local Welfare Committee. It was to be known as The Cleghorn Shield for the annual competing for the best sportsman at RAAF Ballarat. The CO had invited for this unveiling, Honorary Members of the Mess and, in particular, the Mayor, Cr Bill Wray. In the meantime and unbeknown to anybody, one Flt Lt Don Clegg, a Physical Training Officer, on three months temporary duty from Adelaide and who on a number of occasions had run foul of Harry Cleghorn, was up to no good, He was a keen mushroom gatherer and had, earlier that day, found the skull of a steer (with horns still attached). He had quickly fashioned a wooden shield out of three-ply, neatly varnished affixed the skull and in rather finger dipped in tar fashion, had inscribed the words The Clegg-Horn Shield.

He surreptitiously replaced the original with it (the original having that afternoon been mounted on the wall alongside the fire-place, suitably adorned with purple velvet curtains and gold thread draw-string). Imagine the uproar when the CO called upon his Mayoralty to kindly unveil the plaque,. The CO certainly then had reasons to change his management style but was thwarted by Clegg's earlier departure for S.A.

My last bit of formal training was completed just after Easter and whilst the then issued P.O.R

(of which I did not keep a copy) noted that:- O32330 Flying Officer A.E. Ilton (Technical Radio Branch) has successfully completed No 1 Specialist Officers Initial Radio Course; factually it would have been more accurate had it said successfully completed without knowing much. With this sudden technical achievement, on paper anyway, I was posted to No 1 Aircraft Depot Laverton for Radio Officer duties, (which I now recall while writing this and that I have omitted to mention earlier, Flight Lieutenant Geoff Mierish who had lain on his back in such an undignified way when undergoing refresher flying course at Richmond but unfortunately bombed out, who was also on my Ballarat course and was posted to be Radio Officer at Base Squadron Laverton and became from time to time a good shoulder for me to cry on). My effective date of posting being in May did not leave much time for effecting such domestic arrangements as selling Mattee's family home in Ballarat, with my adding to her proceeds and also my entitlement to a War Service Home loan, then seeking out something suitable in Melbourne, all hopefully, in a time frame centred around Mattee's expected confinement date of mid September.

We managed fairly quickly a successful auction of the Ballarat property but not before my move to Laverton where I was living in the Officers Mess though I did go back to Ballarat most weekends. On several, Mattee came down to town, as we called Melbourne then, to House hunt. We eventually found a nice little house in East Ormond for 3,500 pounds (\$7,000) and where we moved at the end of July 1954.



**Mattee's home in
Ballarat, [\(Back\)](#)**

*(Snow-covered in winter
of 1954).*

MY LAVERTON DAYS 1954. [\(Back\)](#)

By the time I had completed my training programme at Ballarat, most of the euphoria associated with my commissioning had begun to fade. The wearing of the thin little Pilot Officer

braid, now substituted by the much fatter braid of a Flying Officer and having become relatively accustomed to everyone of Warrant Officer rank and below saluting me whenever in uniform and walking around a RAAF establishment, I began to take for granted my elevated position to the commissioned ranks.



Our First House, Mandalay, 1954 (83 Marlborough Street East Ormond) Melbourne Victoria ([Back](#))

Strange though the minute I stepped back onto the Laverton hallowed ground, (the second oldest Station in the RAAF), the euphoria again emerged. Fired I guess by being back at my birth-place, which I had already re-visited in 1947/48 during my Recruit Course. And, now back again, only six-relatively-short-years later, but this time as one of the (very light-weight)



heavies. This sea-change seemed even more poignant when I first walked into the front lobby of that beautiful and quite Baronial, RAAF Laverton Officer's Mess (left). A place in which the only occasion I had visited was to wallop pots in the kitchen for the then heinous crime of not having my bed-roll in inspection order.

([Back](#))

I did make earlier mention of RAAF Laverton still having the war-time shadows of a sprawling tin-city at the eastern end of the establishment. All of this of course was overshadowed by the rather grand and solid, permanent brick and tile nature of the original (1927) architecture. From hangars and administrative buildings to workshops and to Messes and from Married Quarters to accommodation blocks for living-in junior NCO's and

airmen. The Station Commander's residence, in somewhat similar style to the HQ's, set among beautifully landscaped gardens and trees, with an outside entertaining area on an island midst a willow-treed fringe to an ornamental lake, complete with ducks and water-hens. I must confess, at that time, to a feeling, for the first time in my life of 27 years, of very much being at home at this beautiful oasis set in that wind-swept corner of the Werribee plains. In this vein, it too was rather incongruous, that when catching a train from the RAAF Aircraft Siding to Melbourne, after stand-down a few days after my arrival, I stopped at the paper kiosk outside the station ticket office and wondered whether the chap serving would have any knowledge of the Hyde family who had owned the Laverton newsagency back in the 30's. In particular I enquired about a Mr Mick Hyde. He looked at me and said I'm Mick Hyde and you must be young Teddy Ilton. I nearly fell over with surprise. Twenty years had elapsed in the meantime, I had only been seven on the last occasion but he said your little round face hasn't changed. ([Back](#))



The then RAAF Laverton had a peculiar mish-mash of roles, I say this mainly because of the RAAF, having at the time, three separate higher command structures namely Home Command, Training Command and Maintenance Command. The result being that the Station Commander of the day owed allegiance, (as well as to Her Majesty the Queen), to the three separate Air Officers Commanding each of these Commands. No 1 Aircraft Depot was a Maintenance Command Unit. Aircraft Research and Development Unit and Communications Unit, came within the bailiwick of Home Command and the Recruit Training Unit and National Service Training Unit within the control of Training Command.



1 AD Headquarters, Laverton. ([Back](#))

As well as the higher administration areas of Laverton needing to keep fingers on pulses, diary

notes took on greater significance with AOC's annual inspections coming around seemingly, once a quarter. I can remember three of the same, during the less than twelve months period that I was at Laverton. One incident in particular occurred when the then AOC Home Command, AVM Walters, was making his annual look see. I particularly remember this occasion given the fact that the Jel Cumming saluting story originated therefrom, (this same story has been attributed to nearly every RAAF Base in Australia and, in each case, concerns then Wing Commander (later Air Commodore) Jel Cuming. However, here is my version and I do have a stack of bibles handy to which I now pledge my oath. The story goes something like this, but with first, a lead in which as also about saluting, the star of this occasion being Air Commodore Knox-Knight (of earlier Rathmines fame).

TO SALUTE OR NOT TO SALUTE (RAAF STATION LAVERTON 1954) [\(Back\)](#)

After a recent visit to Laverton by the AOC Home Command, the AOC found a need to remind the Station Commander, Group Captain J R Fleming, of some observations which he made including a distinct and obvious slackness in saluting about the place. He exhorted the Commander to please remind all concerned of the need to pay compliments to officers. A quick word was passed around to all concerned including the briefing of Guard Commanders and entrance gate sentries. The following two incidents occurred within a day or two of each other.

1. The Station Commander of RAAF Pt Cook, Air Cdre Knox-Knight had been invited to the Christmas Ball at the Laverton Officer's Mess as too were a number of other heavies from the Army and Navy. In recognition of these visiting senior officers, the Station Commander arranged for a Quarter Guard (one officer and 25 airmen) to be mounted a hundred yards or so inside the northern gate at Laverton from which position the said Quarter Guard would provide the appropriate Present Arms to the visiting senior officer visitors as each drove by towards the Officers Mess. Being in the days of National Servicemen it was not unusual for the guarding of entrance gates to be manned by these personnel. And, so it came to pass when the said Air Cdre Knox-Knight drove up to the northern gate at Laverton fully booted and spurred in all his formal regalia, the driver stopped the car and gave the guard the identity of his passenger as being Air Cdre Knox-Knight, who had been invited to the Christmas Ball at the Officers Mess.

The guard having accepted the visitors bona fides, gesticulated the staff car through the gate with a wave of the hand. The Air Cdre immediately ordered his driver to stop the car and then put his head out of the rear window and roared at the Guard, don't you ever pay compliments to officers, to which the startled Guard quickly replied, Aw yeh sorry Sir, Merry Christmas. The Air Cdre almost suffering apoplexy by this stage rejoined with I don't mean Seasonal Greetings you dim-wit (or words to that effect) I mean what about the bloody salute. The Guard as quick as a flash replied, Aw struth sir, that has already been taken care of, you get the salute another hundred yards down the track and with a knowing smile of being on the ball immediately about-turned into the Guard House.

2. The next day, Saturday afternoon same place, same Guard, Wing Commander Jel

Cumming, the then Commanding Officer of ARDU (Aircraft Research and Development Unit) at Laverton, who was a living-in officer at Laverton, was returning in his highly polished Rover motor car, from his usual Saturday game of golf at Royal Melbourne. He pulled-up at the Northern Gate, but unlike the Air Cdre of the night before, was not fully booted and spurred, but dressed only in civilian attire. He wound down the window, the Guard seemed particularly attentive however before he could enquire as to the visitor's bonafides, the voice of the driver said quite casually, Wing Commander Cumming, to which the obviously relieved and appreciative Guard, replied Gee thanks sport, I'll bung him a good salute when he gets ere.



RAAF Laverton's non-saluting North Gate.

Having set pretty much the RAAF Laverton scene of the mid-1950's, I should now spend a little time on my new role at No 1 Aircraft Depot. Earlier, in this narrative, when discussing RAAF people whom I'd met in Cairns and, later served with again after my joining the RAAF, I mentioned a pilot by the name of Anson, who became OC Test and Ferry at the Depot. He flew the aeroplanes in for major overhaul, tested them following the overhaul and then flew them back to their parent unit. The major overhauls included engines, airframes and ancillaries, the latter being, instruments, electrical, radio and armament. So there was a Depot section where each of these trades was carried out, most of it in the hangar where the aircraft remained during its overhaul, but also quite a lot, where component parts had to be removed to the appropriate specialist workshop.

I was appointed to be the Junior Radio Officer in the Depot Radio workshops. My boss was a Sqn Ldr Vic Smith and his 2 i/c was Flt Lt Eric (Shorty) Maine. On my first day on the job "Shorty" introduced me to a new form of Man Management which had not been covered at OTS. The Section W.Off had come into Shorty's office (which I shared with him), muttering words of dismay concerning a recalcitrant Radio Mechanic with whom he was having problems. The W.Off sought Shorty's advice as to how to handle the situation who, reaching into his desk drawer threw him a stick of chalk, On enquiry by the W,Off as to its purpose, Shorty, with a wry smile on his face, directed the W.Off to draw a bum on the airman's forehead and then to kick some sense into him. I could see that I had a lot more to learn concerning what might be a

more practical and basic style of management.

No 1 A.D. was commanded by a General Duties Pilot and during my time it was Group Captain Eric Millett, one of nature's gentleman. His next in line, on the speciality engineering side, was the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) Wing Commander McCorriston an Aircraft Engineer, who in turn was supported by, usually a Squadron Leader, Radio Officer, Armament Officer, Electrical Officer, Instruments Officer etc. These would be spread around the various workshops with, if you like, the Nerve Centre being the Administrative organisation within Depot Headquarters.

The Depot as it was called, would start the day, at 0800 hours, with all hands being part of the morning parade on the Station Parade ground. Assembled as an entire Squadron, with all Laverton others and, following the raising of the RAAF Ensign, the reading of Daily Routine Orders by the Station Adjutant, inspections of troops etc; everyone would march off, heading down Burma Rd to the Depot buildings and would successively break-off to the respective work areas. Then at 1130, the troops would again fall-in and march back to the domestic area for lunch in the Airmens Mess. Senior NCO's and Officers would proceed to their own Mess for lunch; this procedure was reversed at 1245 hours and again at 1615 hours a similar march to the domestic area for stand-down. The living-out personnel would generally, as one, move to the Aircraft Siding to catch the afternoon train to Spencer Street and then spread-out, generally again by train, to the various suburbs of Melbourne. Those who owned motor cars, very much in the minority at that time, would drive to their place of abode.

In my case, for the first two months, I lived-in at the Officers Mess. until as mentioned earlier, the end of July when Mattee and I moved into our new home at East Ormond. Even then, as was the custom of the day, married officers whose homes, either rented or owned, were in suburban Melbourne, continued to live-in at the Officers Mess three nights per week, i.e Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Mattee had learned that the maternity wing of the Bethlehem Private Hospital at East Brighton enjoyed a high reputation of excellence. We managed to book her in there for her confinement. Our first child, Gary, was born there on 14th September 1954 and with him came a lot of joy to us both, Mattee being such a natural and capable mother. I fairly quickly moved into a daily work routine at the Depot, being assigned to a limited technical role, the rest being daily duties associated with technical administration. There were also constant flying operations going on outside and, I must say, I spent as much time as I was able, soaking-up the RAAF aviation atmosphere which I really always enjoyed.



The view from the Depot roadway looking back towards the ARDU & Comm Unit hangars.

I did enjoy life in the Officers Mess. It was a grand way of living with high standards of sleeping accommodation, meals and of course, social life likened to that of the gentry of the times. In fact, Officers Messes had been described as the home of the living-in officer, the Club of the

living-out officer and the social centre of the Station. Also another appealing feature of Mess life, as far as day-to-day living costs were concerned, it was without charge in those days. Mattee and I attended our first Officers Mess ball at Laverton and managed to get back there on relatively frequent occasions during the rest of our life in the Service and when in the Melbourne area.



*Christmas Ball RAAF Laverton Officers Mess, 1954
(note the bat wing collar & starched shirt of the day.)*

At this stage of my life at RAAF Laverton and with discussions being centred around the Officers Mess, perhaps some discourse on Customs and happenings might prove useful for a better understanding of the times. Formal Dining-In Nights were monthly occasions when all officers of the Mess whether living-in or living-out were required to attend. This type of evening could well be traced back to the normal evening dining arrangements among the gentry where the ladies dined in all their finery and the gents in the then appropriate formal dining wear for the times. The latter fashion in the early part of the 20th century became swallow-tail-suits with stiffly starched shirts and while bow-tied batwing collars. More latterly, dinner suits with soft shirt and black bow tie tended to prevail.

Not too far back from my time of recall would have been all Military officers being required to wear formal (now referred to as Mess Kit) attire to the evening meal. This consisted of full dress dining-uniform according to the style of each particular Regiment, together with the ubiquitous boiled shirt and bat-wing collar plus a starched white small brass-buttoned vest. Strict dining protocol was the order of the day. The dinner being presided over by the President of the Mess Committee (PMC) usually an officer of rank one below the Commanding Officer. The most junior officer in the Mess was usually given the position of Dining Vice-President through whom, officers wanting to address the gathering, would have to ask Mr Vice for the PMC's approval. (a bit like the Speaker in Parliament procedure, but seldom one where there was anything remotely likened to a Mr Speaker's authoritarian approach). The Royal Air Force, following its formation, quickly adopted these customs as too did the Royal Australian Air Force when it formed in 1921. Which brings me back to 1954 when the extended custom of weekly dining-ins had its origins at RAAF Station Laverton under the instigation by the then Station Commander, Group Captain J.R Fleming. He had, quite some time back, introduced this weekly (Thursday

night) dinner routine to which all officers had to attend and to which full Mess Kit had to be worn. The only relaxation being that a soft-white shirt could be worn (with black bow tie) in favour of the otherwise accustomed (and terribly uncomfortable) boiled shirt with its stiffly starched bat-wing collar. There seems little doubt that the good Group Captain had introduced this system (later called mess undress) as a penalty to all the married officers who used to live-in three nights a week and, as described at the time, love-out for the remaining four. It was during one of these occasions when a most remarkable and un Mess like incident involving the Mess Manager, his name being Flight Lieutenant Ted Whitehead. A pilot whose primary duty involved bringing selected RAAF NST budding pilots up to a 50 hour ab initio flying standard in Tiger Moths. As he had only a handful of pupils this gave him plenty of time for such secondary duties as a Mess Manager, according to the Group Captain anyway.

Ted Whitehead, (by the way no relation to either John Whitehead the pilot, or Ted Whitehead the engineer, both of whom attained subsequent Air rank, also, the latter was a member of my Staff College course), made no secret of the fact that he was not enamoured with the Mess Manager position. Over the odd ale or two at the bar of an evening, he was quite vocal about lots of Mess things. He particularly disliked the innovative weekly Dinner routine, which he had to organise. He was more than overjoyed when his posting away to full flying duties was announced, as will soon be revealed, he made sure he would go out with a bang. Ted Whitehead, was a small dapper little man, with a shock of red hair and a wispy, ginger, typical air-crew moustache. He had an ever-present mischievous look in his eye and his final dinner routine was the day before his posting away.

It was the custom to assemble for the Thursday night dinner at 1830 hours, (for 1900), when only sherry would be served, (beer and other forms of drink were frowned upon before dinner, due to a subsequent and likely need for a toilet visitation during dinner). The occasion was also one utilised by the Commander for welcomes and farewells to new arrivals and imminent departures. Ted soon let us know that his departure was imminent when he fronted up for dinner dressed as a RAAF Nursing sister, complete with white baby heeled shoes, white lisle stockings (with ginger hairs not inconspicuous) a white frock with the traditional blue cape and, the lot, capped with the then ubiquitous nurse's veil. He looked a rare sight and all assembled although quite nonplussed were more than ready to enter into the spirit of the occasion. The Commander rarely showed before 1855, usually accompanied by the PMC (at this time a Wg Cdr Dick Hunt an Armament Officer with ARDU). One of Ted's minions kept both the Group Captain and the PMC well away pre-dinner from the new Nursing Sister, to avoid the premature spilling of the beans.

It was also customary that any new officer would sit beside the Group Captain. This was effected at the last minute, in the rather dim candle-lit dining room, Ted's face was obscured by his well-positioned veil and the lisle encased prickly-pear legs were well hidden under the table. The PMC called upon the Padre to say grace, which put the finishing touch, at that moment anyway, to the solemnity of the occasion. However, this solemnity was soon put asunder as within minutes of being seated the new nursing sister's ample (toy balloon) breasts started to flash intermittently and one at a time, with a red-light (port) on one side and a green (starboard) on the other. (Ted had positioned coloured torch globes nipple-wards, with battery and switch positioned on his thigh). As could well be imagined, the mostly hilarious uproar in the dining room, staggered both the Commander and the PMC. Ted Whitehead was banished from the dining-room quite unceremoniously and quickly disappeared off the RAAF Station Laverton's precinct that very night, being subsequently admonished through official channels. As a quite

new officer, I wondered what Group Captain Stradling (the RAF Customs of the Service author) would have thought of this charade. The Group Captain Commander's thoughts were soon well known when the decision was made to discontinue Dinner Routines. Another good thing arising from the whole affair was the resultant custom which was adopted throughout the Service, of dispensing with boiled shirts and bat-wing collars at Dining-In Nights.

Eventually, they were dispensed with altogether with Mess dress, soft white shirts becoming the norm. Ted Whitehead did not stay in the RAAF much longer afterwards, I seem to remember he married quite well into the grazing establishment of the Western District of Victoria. Many years later, when as a Wing Commander at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, I was, as it turned out, on my last posting, it was my custom to have lunch in the RAAF Officers Mess in Coventry Street, where little Ted was an honorary member. He also and, quite often, attended for lunch too. It gave him great enjoyment to have a lunch-time drink with me and recount the episode of 1954 telling the story of his, albeit short, period as a RAAF Nurse at Laverton.

A few pages ago I made mention of annual visits of Air Officer's Commanding to RAAF Stations within the areas of their Command. Primarily this was an on-the-spot look-see as to role, programming, general efficiency and personnel/morale aspects. The latter sometimes allowed for a parade to the A.O.C for the venting of a particular personal problem. The next up-the-line type visits would be the annual visit of the Chief of the Air Staff (now called Chief of Air Force) plus Occasional visits of Ministers of State and others of similar or higher standing. Without exception, each of these visits required the mounting, as a demonstration of respect to the office of the visitor, of a Guard of Honour of 100 men. I was privileged during my short period at Laverton in 1954 to be part of a Guard of Honour for the then Prime Minister, Mr R.G. Menzies. As he hesitated in front of me I remembered the former two occasions I was in his august presence, firstly as a young bandsman at Warragul in 1942 and then 20 years later, when on board the RMS Oronsay returning from Malaysia, the more personal occasion. He paused in front of me, I would like to think with recognition, but more likely was thinking Air Force officers are looking younger these days. ([Back](#))



Another event at Laverton provided a recurrence of thought going back to the early 30's with the topic of Air Force Christmas trees and Santa arriving by air as part of the strutting of his stuff. I had been at the Depot a few months when a young Corporal visited our Section with the enquiry as to my being interested in bringing one's children to the annual Christmas Tree celebration. This certainly took my mind back to my sister and my involvement 20 years earlier. I had to decline as I knew that my infant son was not yet ready for Santa, however, I suddenly remembered my mother's two children (then 10 and 8) from her second marriage and whose father had only recently passed away. I asked if I could nominate my young brother and sister to which instant approval was given. I couldn't ring Mum as phones had still not become a standard part of the average household, however I made it my business to call on her the very next weekend and to issue the invitation for a visit to Santa.



*Guard of Honour RAAF Laverton, 1954
Visit of the Prime Minister of Australia
The Rt.Hon.Mr R.G. Menzies QC MP*

She was over-joyed not only for the opportunity for a Laverton re-visit but also to provide some extra cheer for the two kids who had only recently become father-less. In the event I was posted from Laverton a few weeks before Christmas, however, the organisers of the function did not see this as to excluding us from attending as planned. The day duly dawned brightly and excitedly, particularly for my two young siblings. What's more, I'd not be over stating the case by saying Mum was over the moon with nostalgic anticipation, attendant with the still fond memories of her earlier years with the Air Force at Laverton. Mattee decided it would not be the place for a quite small baby so decided not to attend with us. We drove to Laverton in my car and I must admit it was something of a time warp for both Mum and me. Similar arrangements applied as we had remembered. Then, when Santa had finished his many tasks and was sitting back mopping his brow and adjusting his beard Mum said to me Teddy, I wonder what

happened to Billy Williams who used to take the role of Santa back in the 30's. I responded by saying I had no idea but let's go and ask Santa he might remember. So over we wandered leaving the kids to play with their presents. I was in my uniform of a Flying Officer and explained to Santa our earlier life at Laverton, our association with a Cpl Billy Williams who at that time also played Santa Claus and did he know whatever had become of him. Santa looked at me, looked at Mum, pulled his beard off his face and said, in quite an emotional voice; Hello Rita, how have you been over all these years. It was quite a remarkable moment, one which Mum carried with her for the rest of her life. I then found out in discussions with others, that he had remained at Laverton, until retiring from the RAAF a few years earlier (as I think, a Warrant Officer). He never married. The Committee of the Sergeant's Mess at the time of his retirement, offered him Life Membership of the Mess, together with a permanent room in the Mess and a job as Cleaner/Caretaker until his death.

Following a huge funeral service at the RAAF Laverton chapel, which I was able to attend, he was buried at the Footscray Cemetery.



RAAF Laverton 1934, Morning Inspection

Bristol Bulldog Fighters of No 1 (?) Fighter Squadron with Officer and Ground Crew

(This picture is included here, as well as being historical in itself, is also the very area where Santa's aeroplane would park. The kiddies presents would then be distributed in the hangar behind.)

Well now, back to the Depot and my assimilation as an Engineering Officer specialising in matters Radio. I must confess to an increasing level of inadequacy, Caused by the expected knowledge that I should have had to match my, although relatively junior, position, in the

management team at No 1 Aircraft Depot. At this time, it was really only apparent to me, mainly because I had not been confronted with an occasion of being put to the test but then one day in early September the test had to be confronted. Both Sqn Ldr Vic Smith and Flt Lt Shorty Maine were away in Melbourne at a Maintenance Command HQ conference. The W/Off came into my office commenting that a Wirraway aircraft had just come out of the hangar after major overhaul and is ready for a test flight, but the radio has gone U/S (unserviceable). He commented that three of his staff have had a go without success, so I'd be grateful if you would have a look-see, sir. Gratitude was something I feared I was not about to get. I remember the radio concerned was a system called T/R50-43, which we had studied for five minutes when I was on course. Not having been in a Wirraway cockpit before, I was really flying blind. Whilst the W/Off stood on the wing peering into what for the moment was my domain, (the one saving grace was that I didn't have to ask him to where the switches were, as I had already spotted them). I switched and pulled and twisted when suddenly the radio worked. The W/Off was duly grateful, didn't enquire as to my remedial action and I swaggered back to the Section. I knew I couldn't be so lucky on future occasions so decided to take affirmative action. I applied for a transfer to SDAdmin (for which there were again vacancies). Sqn Ldr Smith being well aware of my problem strongly supported my request as did the rest of the hierarchy at No 1 A.D including the CO, Group Captain Millett. I was summoned to Victoria Barracks for interview with two senior Wg Cdr Engineering officers, one whose name I remember, de Kean. They were most sympathetic and helpful, to the extent, within two weeks, the transfer of category had been effected and I was posted to Radio Apprentice School for admin duties w.e.f. November 1954.

*Apprentices and Staff, RAAF Radio Apprenice School, Froggnall
54 Mont Albert Road Canterbury Melbourne.
Where I served as Adjutant from 25th November 1954- 11th August 1957*



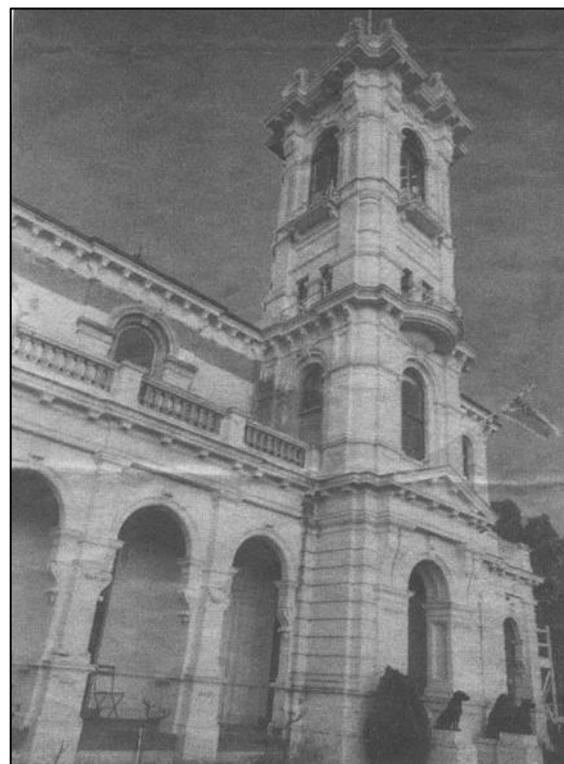
THE FROGNALL DAYS NOV 1954 – AUG 1957. ([Back](#))

The 3 hectare Frognall site was acquired by Clarence and Duane Hicks in 1887 who commissioned an architect, James Gall, to design a Mansion. Later, in 1896, the Hicks family were unable to maintain the payments on the property and it was resumed by the National Australia Bank until 1901 when the Laycock family (of Laconia blanket fame) purchased the property for six thousand pounds. It then became their family home for the next 3 generations.

The Federal Government purchased the property in 1941 for 20 thousand pounds following which it became the Melbourne Telecommunications Unit (MTU) for the RAAF. At its peak, during the war, upwards of 800 personnel were employed therein. The RAAF and MTU remained in occupancy after the war and in 1948 Radio Apprentice School was formed and remained operating from there until the 1960's when their move was made to the re-located School of Radio at Laverton. Diploma Cadet Squadron was formed at Frognall in its stead and remained there until the '80's when the Government sold the property to the Camberwell City Council.

([Back](#))

During the weeks leading up to my posting to Frognall and in fact just a few days after my change-of-Branch interview, out of the blue came a Temporary Duty assignment for me to be the Secretary of the RAAF's Apprentice Interview Board for the Eastern seaboard of Australia. Commencing in Melbourne, then to Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville and finally down to Hobart. Whilst feeling quite honoured for this selection, the timing as far as the home front was concerned could have been better because of Mattee being left on her own, in our hardly settled new place of residence, with our little baby boy Gary, who in such a short time I had come to really adore. The other thing I wondered about was whether this temporary duty with all its administrative detail, was some sort of test as to my suitability for transfer to SD Admin?



In the event and not knowing of my planned move to Radio Apprentice School at the time, the interview board experience turned out to be quite propitious as far as seeing some hundreds of Apprentice aspirants which fortuitously, gave me an insight into the boys I would be encountering for the next three years. I must say, although enjoying every aspect of the Interview Board process, the travelling with T.A.A, staying in the best hotels and the variety of each day, I cannot remember missing anything so much as Mattee and our new son.

As it turned out I did not have to go down to Hobart, so I did get home a few days earlier. I am still amazed at how quickly mother-hood seems to come so natural to a new mother. Mattee had settled in to a very good routine with the baby, who fortunately was extremely content, I guess Mattee's nursing him had something to do with this. We were also very pleased with our

new house, Being one of the immediate post-war constructed houses, where floor size was limited due to the run on building materials, it only had two bedrooms. However, it had a separate lounge and dining-room with double glass doors into the lounge from the front hall and the same doors duplicated from the lounge into the dining-room. The fact that it had a garage (with a sleep-out) was a real bonus. The house was about six years old, with well established front and rear lawns, trees and garden. Unfortunately it was not sewered, (one of the penalties of which, other than the obvious, was kitchen sullage draining through a grease trap which had to be cleaned-out every few months).

Mattee and our new son. ([Back](#))



We were, at the time, the second-last house in the street and the street was not made past our place so the houses being built after we moved in had to put-up with an un-made road for quite a considerable length of time. Despite there being many house-holds without cars, there were still quite a lot of cars becoming bogged during the winter. On a number of occasions, I can recall having to either dig out a neighbour's car en-route to the maternity wing, or even to help carry the (very) expectant Mum to my car where the sealed road started and then, with bated breath and a racing heart, head to whichever maternity hospital the baby had been booked-in and, hoping all the way, into the hospital, that my car would not suddenly be turned into a mis-timed delivery vehicle or even an unplanned mis-carriage. These sort of neighbourly acts quickly widened a camaraderie beyond a normal next-door neighbour relationship and was further enhanced in the mid-1950's with the advent of television and our having the only TV set in the street for quite some time.

It was still in the days where a fowl-run and a vegie garden was common place in the back-yard. Home preserves were made from the back-garden fruit trees, (we had a large cherry plum which later provided a wonderful cradle for a Robinson Crusoe like tree house for the kids, ours and the rest of the neighbourhood's.). One of the mistakes that we made, I guess because of the rainy day syndrome, we thought the bigger the down-payment made on a house purchase, the easier the repayments would be. We had put in more than half, but had, as a result a rather small bank balance. This made us think of the thousand or so pound Jaguar sitting in the garage and nothing much in hand for the rainy day. I mentioned Geoff Svenson earlier, who at the time was also at Laverton and who used to ride backwards and forwards to 1 A.D with me in the Jag. He indicated one morning that he would love to own it. I said that I would reluctantly sell it for twelve hundred pounds and he took me up on it. We purchased a smaller, Vauxhall, car for I think four hundred pounds.

I found the Froggnall environment quite strange, the HQ being in the grand old mansion house and the only sign of anything Air Force, other than the RAAF uniformed personnel, was the RAAF Ensign fluttering from the yard-arm on the (basket-ball court size) parade ground. We were what was referred to as a lodger unit on No 1 Telecommunication Unit (MTU) from which we were quite independent except for common use of the HQ building, the Mess facilities, the Sick Quarters and the Pay Office. As I have already mentioned, MTU was commanded by Wg

Cdr Joe Reynolds to whom I felt (and still do) somewhat obligated for his recommending me for a commission in the first place. He was quite gracious with his welcome when I paid my respects to him on arrival. My C.O, (of Radio Apprentice School), was initially a Sqn Ldr Reg Moore and latterly Sqn Ldr Sam Ritchie. My role became that of Adjutant (later referred to as Administrative Officer). It seemed in some-way to be poetic justice that I would take over from Flt Lt E C Grose (the Iwakuni sergeant's stripe fly-in-the-ointment you might remember) who was prematurely posted-out from Apprentice School due to some personality conflicts. The poetic justice bit involved my being granted the acting Rank of Flight Lieutenant and my taking over from him. I was highly delighted about this unexpected promotion having been a Flying Officer for only eight months. It seemed then an even greater quid pro quo than the earlier demotion in Japan from Sergeant to Corporal, moreover the pay increase was quite substantial. Furthermore, I held the higher duty rank through to my normal time promotion date two years later.

Earlier reference has been made in this narrative to the RAAF's Apprenticeship scheme. Well, Frognall became the home of the Radio Apprentices for the first three years of their apprenticeship and where there were three Courses at any one time, Junior, Intermediate and Senior and I think there was about 30 young blokes on each Course. Given that their academic programme had to be under the sponsorship and the tutelage of a Civil Tertiary Institute, the system adopted was one where the Apprentices would spend each day at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Swanston Street Melbourne. They would leave Frognall each morning in a convoy of buses, spend the day at RMIT, breaking for lunch at the then Trans Australia Airlines cafeteria immediately opposite RMIT and return to Frognall at about 5.pm.



Subjects of General Service Knowledge, Drill, Customs of the Service etc would be fitted-in at Frognall with associated lecture programme breaks at RMIT. They also had to attend supervised study programmes at Frognall after the evening meal. There were some quite significant RAAF staff supervisory aspects involved with relation to the maturing characteristics of boys aged between 15 and 17 and it was often said that staff members had to be surrogate Mum, Dad and religious pastoralist. With the majority of the lads emanating from rural areas and quite a number from broken homes, or from sheltered home environments, the individual fostering needs for each apprentice were seldom the same. A common thread however, related to the individual immaturity (and growing) personality of each Apprentice. There were three Flight Commanders, of Flying Officer rank, each, if you like, the Course Mother for the three apprentice group levels. My role, being responsible to the C.O for the overall administration of the School, did not completely divorce me from some of the surrogate parental aspects, particularly if one of the Flight Commanders was absent.

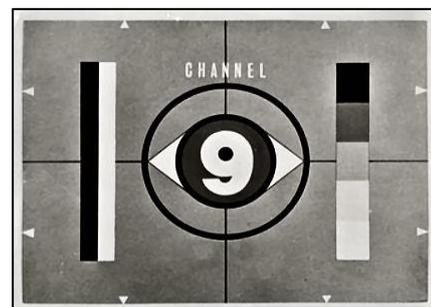
I do remember being involved in some of the Customs of the Service lectures and particularly the questions of general etiquette, i.e table manners and courtesies extended to ladies, I was responsible for presenting Lectures on these subjects and for the setting and marking of the

particular examinations relating thereto. As you can imagine, particularly from first year boys, their answers were quite often in the style of school boy howlers.

One aspect which I used to stress was courtesies to be extended to ladies, i.e. assistance with their chair placement/replacement at the dining table, giving up one's seat in crowded public transport and particularly with the more elderly ladies and assisting them on and off public conveyances. Usually in the exam on the subject one of the questions I gave them concerned these matters. One young lad managed to get the first two right, but and inadvertently and quite humorously, mixed his words with the third by saying, helping elderly ladies to get on and off public conveniences, (the mind boggles). Also paying homage to the immaturity of the junior courses particularly, was the policy of escorting, on leave, those from interstate to interstate capital cities and in some cases to their very home town. This task was spread among all staff members. The more popularly sought after destinations being, as far north as Townsville and west to Perth. There was also a requirement for the junior and intermediate courses to write home once per week, the regularity of this was occasioned by logging each letter in the weekly mail despatch book. On some occasions we did find the only thing enclosed was that of a blank page.

I had similar thoughts about "Graduation Parades," perhaps nothing as grand as a RAAF College graduation or a Wings Parade as Flying Schools but at least something to suitably demonstrate militarily, (and with pride), the successful finality of each three year Course of the RAAF Radio Apprentice School Frognall syllabus. I had arrived at Frognall at about the same time as the commencement of television broadcasting in Melbourne, (the mid '50's), so a Graduation Parade with the A.O.C as reviewing officer and perhaps with TV coverage was not without some possibilities. We did not have a regular Parade Ground and were in fact limited to using our asphalt basket-ball court for morning raising of the RAAF Ensign and daily parade of the Unit's personnel. However, as it was set in the beautiful landscaped grounds of Frognall it would make an ideal setting for Graduation Parade formalities followed by a Garden Party atmosphere for those taking part along with parents of the Graduates, other family members and friends.

The C.O gave me the "green light" to contact GTV9 to discuss their likely interest in covering our forthcoming Graduation Parade. I was pleasantly surprised that they seemed to "jump" at the opportunity, asking at the same time that we give them ample notice together with all the details and further, whether we would have any objections to their attendance at a rehearsal as to timings, positioning of TV cameras etc. We said that the latter could be arranged for the morning rehearsal for the afternoon programme. A day before the Parade lots of telephone calls were made with interested parties together with the fact that the Parade was going to be televised by Channel 9, ("look Mum we're going to be on Tellie"). Similar calls were made to our Headquarter's contacts and to other RAAF establishments. The Day dawned bright and sunny with a rehearsal timed for 1000 hours with T.V camera crews in position.



For the purpose of providing a source of reality and as the C.O would be the Parade Commander he told me to act as a substitute for the Reviewing Officer. The only formality about the Apprentices uniforms during the rehearsal was a white webbing belt being worn with their "working dress" overalls instead of their military "finery". All was in readiness for the actual

event. As it turned out, the day remained quite beautiful, the Parade went off without a hitch, as did the tea and “sticky” buns which followed. We could hardly wait to see ourselves on the “telly” that evening but NO that was not to be, the TV crew delivered the wrong tape to the Programme department. Yes, you wouldn’t believe, the tape they put to air was the Parade rehearsal which they had also taped that morning. Instead of watching proud young Apprentices fully “booted and spurred” in their Ceremonial splendour, viewers saw a rather bedraggled portrayal in their boiler-suited overalls.

While on the subject of Activities in the lovely gardens of Frognall I am reminded of another occasion not long after where ceremonial activities in the garden were again to be the central theme of the occasion.

This Event was one concerning the Consecration of 357, the Chapel at Frognall. Pastoral-care (as mentioned earlier) was an important part of administering an Apprentice School, particularly where there were some 120 or so young lads living on the premises at any one time. So Frognall had a Chapel, albeit a tin hut with kitchen chairs and an otherwise veritable absence of ecclesiastical accoutrements. Services were conducted therein each Sunday by the then Principal Air Chaplain Russell (“Bish” as he was popularly known) who lived only a block or two away from Frognall. He was one of five Principal Air-Chaplains (one for each of the Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations. They wore the rank of Air Commodore, usually with a normal uniform collar and tie rather than the clerical collar, the only clerical badge being a small cross on the shoulders of their tunic). “Bish” Russell had been working on ways and means of improving the chapel furnishings and decor generally.

Pews and christening fonts and lecterns were arranged to be made in the carpenter shop at RAAF Laverton, curtaining and carpeting would come from Church interior decorator Suppliers. When all was in readiness and in situ a Consecration service would be held to which parents and families/friends of Apprentices would be invited. This would be followed by a “garden-party style” activity on the adjacent lawns at Frognall to which the Air Officer Commanding (AVM Charlesworth) was invited to be the Guest of Honour. The consecration day duly arrived as did lots of families and other invited guests, those who could not be seated inside the chapel sat outside and listened to the ceremony as it was relayed on the p.a. system. Each of the five Principal Air Chaplains conducted an appropriate part of the service. Unfortunately the AOC could not attend at the last moment so he sent his deputy along in his stead, Air Commodore Acton.

At the tea party following the ceremony the deputy AOC mingled with the guests and eventually came over to where staff members and I had gathered. On my greeting him and asking him how he was enjoying himself he quickly responded with “Ted, the next bloody civilian that calls me Padre is likely to be clobbered.” (The reason for his chagrin was that the chaplains wore exactly the same uniform and rank as him and, in their ignorance thought he too was a Chaplain rather than a career senior Air Force officer and the Guest of Honour).



During my three years at Frognall I was able to see three Courses graduate and for the next 20 years (until my retirement in 1976) I was able to fairly closely follow the advancement of many of their careers, a significant number reaching senior ranks right through from Squadron Leader to Air Vice-Marshal. I even felt some pride in having been part of their development during their

junior and senior teen years and also quite saddened when in the '60's the Radio Apprentice School at Frognall was dis-established. However, the Diploma Cadet Squadron was formed in its stead .

A former Flt Cdr at the Radio Apprentice School (and whom I had mentored there when he was a young Pilot Officer) Keith Manning was appointed as this new Squadron's first Commanding Officer where he again met up with some of his ex-Apprentices who had returned to Frognall as Technical Branch Cadet Officers. Keith also kept alive the various Honour Boards of sporting and academic achievements of Apprentices who had distinguished themselves during the days of Radio Apprentice School. This new School effectively replaced the method whereby brighter Apprentices on graduation were posted back to Frognall as airmen (generally LAC's) allowing them to return to RMIT for full-time post-graduate studies towards a Fellowship Diploma in Communications Engineering. On graduation they were commissioned as Pilot Officers in the then Technical (Radio) Branch. From memory, up to 20 or more had advanced, during the late 1950's, their careers as Radio Officers. Most reached at least Wing Commander rank.

In looking back now some fifty years later I still cherish the "Frognall" friendships. I also have some pride and gratitude in having had the opportunities to add to the many "milestones" that were created during the quarter of a century "residency" of Radio Apprentice School at this rather delightful and absolutely unique Defence establishment. A premier location in the heart of one of the famous leafy suburbs of Melbourne, Mont Albert Road Canterbury. One of these milestones was undoubtedly the introduction of the Radio Apprentice School Journal (see [HERE](#)).

As well, I coveted my good fortune to actually have had an office in the grand old residence that was once the stately home of the Laycock family (my office was originally part of the ground floor billiard room). Being a virtual "Boarding School" complex, with upwards of 200 teen age boys-in-residence with whom mischievous activities during off-duty hours were not infrequent and some of which became irksome to the neighbouring and predominantly "upper-class" residents . Either the Commanding Officer of the Apprentice School, or myself handled their complaints either by "personal treaty" or appropriate correspondence of an apologetic nature. This was followed-up with the appropriate disciplinary ramification with the offender concerned. I do hasten to emphasise that these nefarious activities were extremely rare; the most common of which being the scaling of a neighbouring property fence to seek some short/temporary freedom from what must to these young lads appeared to be stringent RAAF "custody" regulations.

Every effort was made at the time to ensure that the syllabus of training for the RAAF portion of the Apprenticeship School curriculum, covered a wide variety of sporting activities, not only among themselves but also competing with kindred organisations ie other RAAF, Army and Naval Cadet Apprentice schemes as well as local secondary schools As indicated earlier, the Pastoral aspects of the RAAF Apprentices scheme included the attendance of RAAF chaplains at "Frognall", and reciprocal visits by small groups to a Chaplain's home. Principal Air Chaplain ("Bish") Russell lived close by which provided for his regular visits to Frognall and similar regular visits by Apprentices to his home. Radio Apprentice School Staff officers also made arrangements from time to time to invite small groups of the Senior Courser to dinner at their home /excursions, bivouacs and interstate visits to places of interest were part of the Syllabus for each Course and 'which were activated during the Royal Melbourne Technical College semester breaks. Visits to each Apprentice's home town were also provided at appropriate

times during the year as well as the day-to-day administrative activities associated with the running of the RAAF's Radio Apprentice School, the Frognall complex

The Frognall Officers Mess was situated on the first floor of the mansion and offered opportunities for extending Social invitations to neighbouring property owners, local luminaries and business people. There were less than a dozen officers on the strength of both MTU and the Apprentice School and to enable an effective and regular social programme to be maintained, Honorary Memberships were granted to not only retired RAAF officers living in the area but also to a range of local people whom, with their partners, assured the success of a range of social events including Dinners, Dances and the occasional Garden Party. The Mess kitchen (not the original kitchen of the old residence) had been installed in a converted upstairs bed-room and was connected to the Officers Mess ante-room, bar and dining room. It provided lunch Monday to Friday to all officers of both MTU and the Apprentice School and of course the appropriate catering for Mess Social occasions. The normal evening meal and breakfasts for the few living-in officers was provided for in a separate officer's dining room at the Sergeant's Mess located alongside the Parade Ground.

It was in this dining room that a quite humorous (with the potential for having possible and serious insubordinate ramifications) incident occurred between the Frognall CO Wg Cdr Reynolds and the duty breakfast cook. In setting the scene I should first indicate that, unlike most RAAF establishments of the day, the Frognall complex did not offer any on-base officer appointment married quarters. Wg Cdr Reynolds lived in his own house at the quite distant suburb of Essendon. However, in attempting to avoid a longish drive in the normal each morning's commuter traffic, he would leave home early enough to have breakfast at Frognall. where he would join the few (3 or 4) living-in officers, together with the Orderly Officer, at the Officers dining annex located in the Sergeant's Mess. I was the Orderly Officer on this particular morning and this is what transpired.

The CO had a habit of arriving only minutes before the scheduled closing time for breakfast which was 0745 hours. He would quietly study the menu while the Steward waited patiently and would then order two lightly boiled eggs, two slices of whole-meal toast and a cup of coffee please. However, on this occasion Steward replied nervously "sorry Sir, the eggs are off." The CO's face reddened his eyes narrowed and he exclaimed loudly, "Tell the ruddy (he never actually swore) cook that I want two softly boiled eggs with toast and ruddy coffee and he better be ruddy quick about it. The Steward again, quickly disappeared into the kitchen then the corporal cook then strode into the dining-room coupled with an obvious distained expression. He began - Sir.... but before getting further the CO repeated his order, Corporal I want two ruddy softly boiled eggs with toast and ruddy coffee, with no more ruddy discussion. The Cook looked the CO in the eye and without hesitation angrily commented - Sir, do you think I'm a ruddy chook, there are no more eggs.

While all of this was going on both myself and the other three officers present were mentally preparing for the likely insubordination reflexes on the part of the CO. To his credit, he could see the reason for the Cook's exasperation and seemingly meekly said "just some toast and coffee will do nicely then thank you Corporal". Those of us present were certain that this story would soon be added to the many other stories, whether accurate or inaccurate, about Joe Reynolds which had almost become folklore throughout the RAAF. Regrettably, the many occasions when he more quietly exercised man management situations with fairness and even kindness, were not so well known. He was a pre-war Signals airman and rose from the rank of

Warrant Officer in the early war years to subsequent commissioning with the most of his service in the Instructional field. One of the things that came out of my time at Frognall was my getting to know many members of the Radio Branch of the Air Force, most of whom became firm friends and with whom I served on future occasions.

This can also be said of the number of Apprentices with whom I was honoured to have served at Frognall and who subsequently reached either Senior NCO rank or were commissioned. The original intention of the RAAF's Radio Apprenticeship scheme had without any doubt been attained.

The standards of Radio Technology in the RAAF continued to gain momentum to an even higher level with many of the senior executive positions, not only in the Technical Branch but also in the General Duties Branch, being manned by ex-Apprentices. The other rather warm aspect from a clannish aspect were and remain to this day (2004) the number of ex-Apprentice Course re-unions that are frequently held throughout Australia. I continue to reflect with pride and satisfaction to have had the good fortune to be for a time, "Part of the Frognall Team".

FROM FROGNALL TO STAFF DUTIES – 1957. [\(Back\)](#)

I mentioned earlier something of my first stint with Air Force administrative experiences when employed (as an Acting Sergeant) in the Training Wing Orderly Room at Air and Ground Radio School Ballarat. It was an experience which I was able to put into practise, at a much higher level, when appointed to be the Adjutant of the Radio Apprentice School at Frognall in 1955. 'My day-to-day dealings for the next two years with Training Command Headquarters, at Albert Park Barracks had fired my desire for a next posting to a TCHQ Personnel Staff Officer position. In the event, and to my joy, this came about as a result of my posting from Frognall, but although to Albert Park Barracks it was to be a Junior Staff Officer (Organisation) at the Maintenance Command HQ. This did not match a first preference for Personnel Staff duties, however, I was quite looking forward to broadening my administrative experience as a Staff Officer, a very junior one at that given the scant title of my appointment name being SO.Org.2(b) (i)

It was also at this time that I knew, notwithstanding my 30 or so months of rewarding human experiences at Frognall arising from youth training and counselling duties, I was ready to move on to "greener pastures" and to more general Air Force commitments. However, if this was to germinate further at MCHQ it was short-lived, I was only there for three days, when I was again posted, this time to Victoria Barracks, just a few miles "up the road". But this time and to my joy, I was to be a Personnel Staff Officer, also with as lightly lesser junior title by losing an (i) in the doing i.e. SO Pers.2(b). Before moving to revelations about my new post, I should first tell a story about my short stay at MCHQ!



The first morning at MCHQ I was getting familiar with my less-than-grand office when compared with that of the “Frognall Mansion”. The building was of wooden WWII, two story construction but I had at least a view of the Albert Park lake. My big boss, S.Org.SO, was Gpt Capt E.G (Ted) Fyfe, known to be of a somewhat garrulous nature, (whose lifting of the eyebrow commanded immediate attention) was with a loud voice calling out down to the adjoining office to gain the attention of my immediate boss, SO Org, Wg Cdr Allen. His loud call went something like this, Wg Cdr Allen, how long has the Saviour Lord Jesus Christ been on the strength of AGRS at Ballarat? WgCdr Allen replied “I am not sure what you mean Sir, why do you ask”? The Gp Capt then responded, “I’m reading the annual P1P29 (Officers Confidential Report) of the SAdminO at RAAF Ballarat which suggests he must be as equally good as our Saviour”!

Both my immediate boss at MCHQ, Wg Cdr Allen and Gp Capt Fyfe, although quite astonished at the shortness of my “stay”, did not appear to be making any overtures for my retention for which I was indeed grateful. To be posted to the summit of RAAF administration, i.e. Victoria Barracks Melbourne, was to me something akin to winning a lottery.



The grey-stone splendour of Victoria Barracks St Kilda Road Melbourne

I spent a twelve months stint in the RAAF’s Personnel Branch in Melbourne, known as Department of Air. The more descriptive name RAAF HQ was not to be given it until late 1960’s or even early ‘70’s by which time this HQ had been relocated to Canberra. At this stage I should first spend a little time on the RAAF ‘s overall organisation chain as it obtained in the

late 50's. A trio Command Structure then existed and was based very much on the Royal Air Force. It consisted of three Commands, each with an Air Officer Commanding with the rank of Air-Vice Marshal and were named Home, Training and Maintenance Command respectively. The latter two names are self-descriptive, however not the case with the former which was in fact the Operational Command of the RAAF. As indicated, Maintenance and Training Command HQ were situated at Albert Park Barracks, however, Home Command was located at the foot of the Blue Mountains at Glenbrook. This Command structure was overseen by the Department of Air at the Melbourne Victoria Barracks with an accompanying Political Master, the Minister for Air and the various echelons of his Public Service.

As stated earlier, I was looking forward to being a part of the historical Victoria Barracks, first established in 1825 and still operational from the same site. The RAAF had been in situ from the date of the formation of the then young Air Force in 1921 while uniformed personnel of the Australian Navy and Army were already well established therein at that time. Manning of the Barracks was made up of uniformed Defence personnel matched, or even over-shadowed by, Public Servants of the then respective Defence Departments of Navy, Army and Air. All the Branches of the RAAF were represented at the Melbourne Victoria Barracks site i.e. General Duties (Air Staff), Equipment (Supply), Engineering and Personnel. The Air Staff was headed by an Air Marshal and was titled Chief of the Air Staff. Subsequently in the late 90' s, this title was changed to Chief of Air Force(CAF). Each Branch was headed by an Air Vice-Marshal and these appointments together with a senior Public Servant, Secretary of Department of Air, formed what was then called the Air Board under the umbrella of the Minister of Air who in turn was responsible to the Minister for Defence and Cabinet.

The Branch of the Air Member for Personnel (AMP) and his various Directorates including the one to which I was destined and which was not located in the beautiful blue-stone buildings but, and regrettably, was accommodated in "S" Block on the Western boundary of the Barracks. S Block was a WWII two-storied, weather-board structure with oven-like temperatures in the summer and ice-chest-cold in winter. This building was undoubtedly born out of the same World War II mould as those buildings represented at my former short-lived-post at Albert Park Barracks. AMP at this time was Air Vice-Marshal Scherger, (right) later of Chief of the Air Staff fame as an Air Marshal followed by serving two terms as Chief of the Defence Staff and eventually promoted to Air Chief Marshal. AMP Branch was divided into several Directorates, all of which involved Personnel Management elements for both Officers and Other Ranks namely an amalgam of Conditions of Service for all RAAF personnel i.e. Postings and [\(Back\)](#) Disciplinary matters, Pay and Allowances, Medical Services, Provost, Chaplaincy, Uniforms, Honours and Awards, Legal matters (e.g. Courts Martial), Ceremonial (RAAF Central Band) and Photographic. Then each Directorate had sub-divisions such as Directorate of Postings (Officers) known at that time as PI, similarly for Airmen, P.2 (W/Off down to Aircraftman).



Directors of each were in the main of the rank of WgCdr. My cell in the organization was known as P2(B) and I was responsible for the Discharge of Airmen and the processing of the Long Service and Good Conduct award machinery. I shared an office with a Public Servant (P2A) Mr Dave Baxter who was largely responsible for the Drafting of Air Board Agendum concerning Policy formulation or amendments in respect thereto of non-commissioned ranks. He had been a Bomber pilot in the RAAF during WWII and it was a delight to be sharing the same office with

him, My direct boss P2 was Wg Cdr Jim Lombard, at that time the most senior member of the Special Duties (Admin) Branch in the RAAF. It was during this early stage of my new appointment that one evening when I came home from work Maffee told me the joyous news that she was pregnant again and was expecting to be confined in late October. We were both, I think quite naturally at that time, hoping for the balanced "pigeon pair." In the event, on 31st October 1957, Robyn Dianne Ilton was born and we were naturally overjoyed to now have a little daughter.

Another momentous occasion about this time was our decision to add a television set to our household appliances. I wanted it to be a surprise for Mattee when she came home from hospital. An RAAF officer colleague of mine, Flt Et Keith Whyte, had setup his son in a small TV installation business and on this occasion Keith had offered to select and install the TV set for us on the Saturday before Mattee and babe would be home. It was a fairly hot day and Keith, on arrival said he would have to hop up into the ceiling for the aerial connection work. Whilst up there I asked him if he would join me in a cool beer when he came down, he quickly agreed to this. I duly poured the said beer into two small (7oz) pewter tankards and quickly drank mine. then called out from above if I would please get his small tool bag from the seat of his car. When I returned



(Back) he was standing by his empty tankard and looking a little questionably at my 3 year-old son Gary. I asked him if he wanted another beer, he said he hadn't had the first one yet!! Gary, during my quick absence had spotted the pewters of beer and, having previously on odd occasions had a "sip of Dad's" had made the most of this opportunity and quaffed the lot. I panicked a bit and Keith reassured me that there was as much froth as there was bubble and that he would "sleep it off" on such a hot afternoon. This was in fact the case, he later slept all the way in the car enroute to Caulfield's Bethlehem hospital (where he too had been born 3 years earlier) to see his new baby sister.

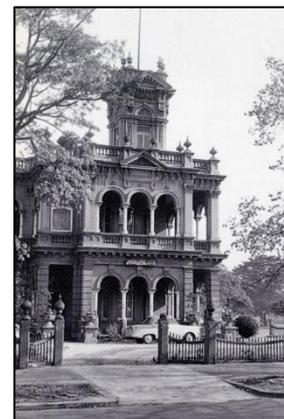


On arrival I was surprised to see the Senior Nun/Matron of the hospital at the front door. She was quick to recognize me from a similar visit when Gary was born and hurried over to renew contact with him who was still asleep in my arms. He quickly awoke when Matron chuckled him under the chin from which he immediately reacted with a large burp. I thought and quite embarrassingly too, that I could notice her grimace from his breath's stale hops smell.

It didn't take long for Mattee and new baby Robyn to be ready for the return home, this they did a few days later. Gary was pleased with his new sister and all four of us soon settled into an orderly domestic routine. Mattee continued to show great confidence as a Mother and I was able to continue the settling in with my new job as an RAAF Staff Officer, albeit a quite Junior one. Our Directorate contained about 50 per cent of RAAF uniformed people with a similar number of civilian members of the then Government "Department of Air". The other interesting aspect was the encouragement for the RAAF members to wear civilian clothes whilst working at Victoria Barracks, the basis for this arrangement was no doubt to emphasise that we were all part of the same "team" and that an outward display of a uniform did not then create any seeming imbalance of importance. Oddly enough, we had to wear uniform on each (fortnightly)

pay day, some argued this was to show gratitude for receiving the King's shilling. Most of the RAAF Staff Officers at the Barracks were amongst a mixture of the Flight Lieutenant and Squadron Leader rank, many with World War II and Korean War Service and some, as well, highly decorated with Distinguished Flying Crosses and Distinguished Service Orders. I must say I was quite honoured to have been chosen to work with and for such distinguished and highly experienced people, many of whom became and remained, for most of my 30 years' service, part of my many long-cherished RAAF friendships.

Another important part of my new world was a working relationship with many of the other RAAF Staff Officers at the Barracks coupled with the spending of many hours of pleasant social time at the then 426 St Kilda Road Officers Mess, situated in an acreage garden allotment in the delightful leafy St Kilda Road. The building which had become the RAAF Officers Mess had begun its life, in the late 19th century, as a two storied rather grand Town House "Iloura" (right) The prompting for it to become an RAAF Officers Mess was due to there having been being no provision for such a facility when the Melbourne Victoria Barracks were established back in the 1800's. An Army Officers Mess had been included to which, in the early 20th Century, both, albeit in small numbers, RAAF and Navy officers had access. The rapid expansion of the RAAF during WWII and its relatively large post-war Melbourne-based officers, demanded the establishment of a separate RAAF Officers Mess within a convenient vicinity to the Barracks.



[\(Back\)](#)

It had, in the late 40's and early 50's become known to a few Air Rank Staff Officers, that "Iloura" was on the market. With their personal initiatives and busy endeavours they were able to form a "Trust" which facilitated it's purchase. Only minor alterations were necessary to offer not only perfect facilities for day-time Monday to Friday luncheon dining for a large number of RAAF officers and equivalent civilian DepAir employees but also a limited live-in facility for unaccompanied Melbourne based RAAF Staff Officers. Additionally, and most importantly Iloura, or "426" as it was soon to be identified, became a delightful venue for RAAF Social functions. It remained this until the early 1970 s, when the RAAF Trustees in concert with a General Meeting of the Victoria Barracks based Melbourne RAAF Officers, agreed to its sale and the building of a new Officers Mess in Coventry Street, immediately opposite Victoria Barracks, when the Melbourne based RAAF Staff Officers posts were transferred with the HQ Support Command re-location to RAAF Base Laverton. (An earlier relocation to Canberra, in 1959, of the then Melbourne RAAFHQ and Department of Air employees had already begun a dramatic depletion of RAAF officers Melbourne based but more of that in following chapters!)

I soon settled in to the routine of a HQ Staff Officer. My immediate Boss was Wg Cdr (Jim) Lombard who was quick to encourage me into the mysteries and wonders of Staff duties. My main areas of interest concerned Airmen, (i.e. ranks/classifications from Aircraftsman to Warrant Officer) and in particular the administration of Discharge procedures, both of the Honorary and Disciplinary kind. Other less arduous duties involved the award of the Long Service and Conduct medal to those airmen completing the necessary length of service, (18 years). Another and rather enlightening duty was the preparation of Minister question responses. I use the word enlightening because until that time with ten years RAAF experience I was very much aware of the impropriety of Servicemen making contact with avenues of possible political persuasion.

I thought any reference to Ministers must be the concern of gentlemen of the Cloth and reversed collar and not the political office of Minister. Evidence of my ignorance in this latter regard was brought home to me when the first correspondence file landed on my desk with a large pink slip on the cover on which, emblazoned in large print, was the word "MINISTER". I knew, that the HQRAAF Padres had their office upstairs so I quietly carried the file to their office only to be told the dastardly news that the file was about a Ministerial enquiry from the then Minister of Air and had to be handled with considerable Gusto and Care!!

What was more alarming for me, was the "*drop everything else*" attitude when a Ministerial enquiry came through!. Even more disturbing were the number of Officer grievances which were often first aired through Ministerial channels. I even held after a while, the "charitable" notion, that the Minister may have also been conscious of either votes lost or gained as well as the gain or loss occasioned by the uniformed complainant!. In any event I did not then, or even since, ever hear of the universal threat to Servicemen venturing into the political arena, that such action could/would lead to the Court Martial offence of Conduct to the Prejudice of Good Order and Air Force Discipline. As the months quickly went by for me in this new role of a Staff Officer - albeit a most Junior one I did take to it like a "fish to water"!.

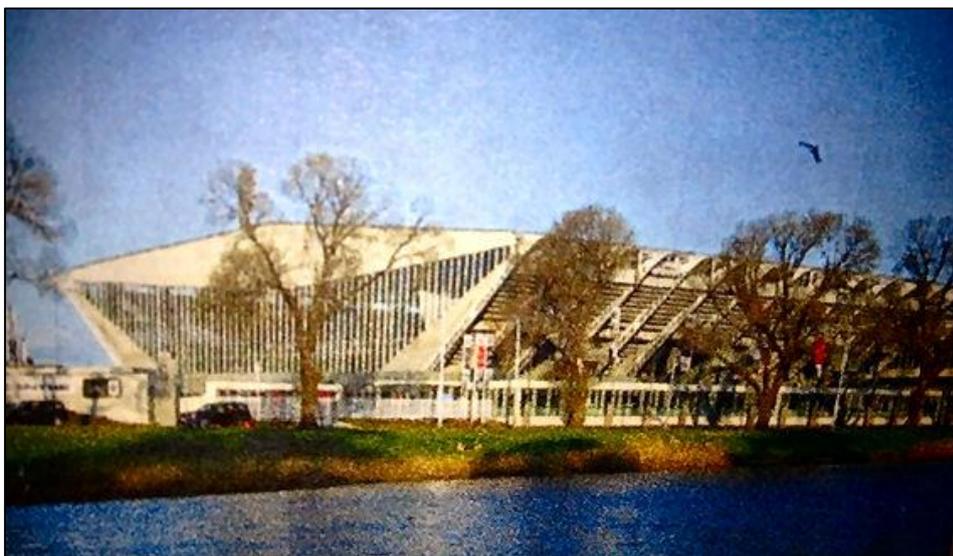
Whilst on this point of "water", my mind goes back to my time at "Frognall" when the Olympic Games had hit the City of Melbourne in 1956 and when I also had been, among my other Unit duties, the Unit Swimming Officer. Not because of any personal "aquatic" skills but because of the many sports in which we encouraged ("ordered"?) the indulgence of our hundred or so RAAF Apprentice sporting-participants. My role as Swimming Officer also took me into the annual Inter-Service Sports arena in which the RAAF, Navy and Army competed for the Inter-Service Swimming Cup. Meetings of the various Swimming Officers were held regularly at Victoria Barracks leading-up to this annual event. These meetings were chaired by the host Service for the particular year. ([Back](#))



It was the RAAF's turn in 1956 and I was appointed to be the RAAF Swimming Officer for the annual - October 1956 - Inter-Service Cup. The venue for this annual event was the Richmond Bath's Olympic-size pool, however, it was quite a cheer-less place being of an earlier (1920?) design and did not offer a lot of seating space for spectators and "cheer squads". On the other hand, Melbourne had, at the time, its brand new purpose-built Olympic Pool with a seating capacity of 4,500 where the most successful Olympic swimming events had been held a few months earlier. I noted this and knew what a wonderful venue it would be for our 1956 Inter-Service swimming event. I followed up this interest with the Melbourne Lord Mayor's office at the same time advising of my Inter-Service RAAF Swimming responsibilities and I enquired as to the possibility of the Melbourne Olympic Pool being available for our forthcoming event and under what circumstances - (being careful in not committing ourselves without RAAF approval for use such a venue.) I was pleasantly surprised at the alacrity of approval-response to my request should the Mayor's Office whether firstly receive an official request from the RAAF. Moreover there would be no charge and the Pool would be reserved for our sole use.

As can be imagined, it was with a great deal of enthusiasm and pride that I submitted the above proposal to our Swimming Committee at Victoria Barracks the following week. Each member of the Committee was equally enthused with the only reservation that our accustomed small number of spectators might rattle around in such a huge seating venue!. In the event the 1956 Inter-Service Swimming Championships were a huge success with a "Cheering Spectator Squad" of 4,500 urging on their particular Service Swimmer/Diver!.

Not long after I arrived at Victoria Barracks in 1957 as a means of still catching-up on my new duties, I remained in my office over the lunch hour and was quite startled on one occasion when my office door opened and in walked Air Vice-Marshal Scherger, my "big Boss". He commented "well it is great to see someone else in the Building besides me Ilton, where is everybody? I was unable



**THE MELBOURNE OLYMPIC POOL -
1956 [\(Back\)](#)**

to answer other than to say "I don't really know Sir, I'm just catching-up on a bit of File reading. He commended me for this and went out as quickly as he came in. It was a Friday, and I later learned that Friday lunch was an occasion when many of the AMP staff went up to Jimmy Watson's in Carlton for a quick steak lunch combined with a glass of red "the Leader of the push" being Wg Cdr Mick Mather who was then Staff Officer Posts and most of the participants were from the Posting Staff. I hasten to say most of us were on the job with a 0700 start often working through the lunch hour and working on after 1700 in the afternoon. Similarly with most other AMP staff who would take their Friday lunch hour at the 426 Mess and not Jimmy Watson's.

I eventually became a 426 Friday luncheon regular where, I must say, the occasion was also often used to keep the Hangar Doors Open and the resolving of some problem or other with a mutually inclined AMP Branch staff member. We were to get a new AMP later in 1957 "Scherg" became CAS and was replaced by AVM W Hely.

THE DEPARTMENT OF AIR MOVE TO CANBERRA 1959 [\(Back\)](#)

With the change of AMP's came a change of boss for our P2 Directorate, Wg Cdr Lombard was replaced by Wg Cdr Howard Gavin a WWII bomber pilot who had transferred at the end of the War to the RAAF's Administrative Branch. Even greater changes to the whole AMP Branch were imminent and indeed the entire Department of Air at Victoria Barracks - both uniformed and civil personnel were destined for transfer to Canberra beginning in mid-1959. This was a rejuvenation of the much earlier planned move of all Defence Departments to the ACT which

had begun in 1927. Such a move was to coincide with the 1927 Parliament House opening in Canberra. However, the Depression at the time did very much put the brakes on to this Plan. Then the Nation had barely risen out of the Depression when the Second World War began. So the move was postponed for a second time for a relatively long period - 14 years.

The Move was not so much a new experience for the uniformed members at the Melbourne Victoria Barracks Navy, Army and RAAF - but very much so for the civilian element - who in the main had never left Melbourne. I have no idea how many people in total were involved, but it would have been many hundreds, even thousands. And these same numbers had to be housed. As a result many actual new suburbs were developed each radiating out to the North, South, East and West from the Capital's Civic Centre, e.g. new suburbs of Dixon, Campbell and O'Connor to name a few. The organisational support for the move was also rather remarkable, admitted by many as the best that many of the uniformed element had ever had!! The persuasive powers of the Civil Staff Union strengths would no doubt have "aided" and "abetted" this?? We even had a bag of coke/coal awaiting us at the back door for our slow combustion stove in our new house! Yes indeed new houses - this was also remarkable.

The programme for the Big Move was headed by a RAAF Sqn Ldr (Bill Longmuir) and a senior civil servant (Brian Shine) (a position they held for eighteen months) and these two men were assisted by the efficient and thorough Housing Staff. This "Division" was set-up in a special large room at Victoria Barracks complete with maps of all the new suburbs with photos and floor plans of all the many and different housing designs. Each member then had 3 draws from two ballot boxes the first box was for Suburb the second for the selection of House type. Another remarkable aspect when a "census" was taken after the Move showed quite clearly that most people got their wish within their three chances. In my case we had selected a two storey duplex in the new suburb of Campbell and we managed to click this with our first choice. Yet another marvellous aspect of the move, if you happened to be still living in the same house some short years away later, you then had an opportunity to purchase it with very attractive mortgage/purchase conditions. We didn't have that opportunity but it presented itself when we were again in the ACT in 1968, but more of that later.

OUR FIRST POSTING TO CANBERRA JULY 1959 TO JULY 1960 ([Back](#))

The obvious preliminary to our move to Canberra was to find a suitable tenant for our Melbourne house. We did not want to sell it mainly because of a love for Melbourne. A Real Estate friend managed to locate a good tenant at 30 pounds per week so we were able to plan our Canberra move with the house-letting having been satisfactorily removed from the equation.

Other than the usual aspects of the setting-up of a different house and in this case a new house with no garden, the work place was at least much the same as in Melbourne particularly with all the same staff, Office space was entirely different - very few separate offices - the main theme being glass partitions creating little privacy and for this reason a new way of concentration had to be developed, We were "officed" in what was then called the Admin Building a new huge behemoth style building adjacent to the then Parliament House and quite convenient to our suburb of Campbell. A convenience not quite the same at rainy times. The Lake had not been

created at that time and our drive to work required a crossing of a small forded creek. Any heavy rain shower would make it impassable by car and the distant Commonwealth Bridge had to be utilised.

One of the things that we as RAAF officers sorely missed was the great pleasures of the Melbourne Mess at 426 St Kilda Road. The only thing which had little likeness at all to the usual comforts and pleasures of an Officers' Mess was, what we referred to as, a "broom cupboard". This was located, if I recall, in the Basement of the Admin Building. Our civilian Finance "masters" were not able to visualise, or even comprehend, an Officers' Mess as being an important part of the Military psyche where many a time a new Policy would be germinated or a Policy matter could be resolved! This state of affairs was eventually changed to something a little better, but even later over at the Russell Offices, the Officers' Mess was still a far-cry from what was historically acceptable. I can even remember many of us driving over to RAAF Station Fairbairn on a Friday afternoon for a convivial glass in that most hospitable Mess. The Mess Committee-men at Fairbairn were also quick to offer we "Visitors" as a part of their regular Mess Social Programme. This was rather wonderful and we did not need any "holding back"!

There was, in the early stages, general and continuing comment among most, concerning our new domestic arrangements, including the landscaping obstacles - rocks to be removed - the type of lawn-seed needed - planting varieties of shrubs and seedlings etc.. As far as lawns were concerned there was no such thing in those days as the now common turf, it had not been invented for domestic lawn development! After I lost my first two efforts of lawn-growing to the thunder-storms of the time, I resorted to covering the seeded area with hessian which protected it from the birds as well as providing quick germination of the lawn seed. Moreover it could be mowed as it rotted.

**OUR TYPICAL 1959 DEFENCE
DEPT. HOUSE IN CAMPBELL.**
[\(Back\)](#)

Other than the extremely severe winters in Canberra, which were compensated to some extent by the slow combustion heaters in all the new homes, the absence of the (1959) yet-to-be Television



Signal in the ACT and the many and varied re-Settlement adjustments, most of the Defence "immigrants" soon settled in and began to enjoy their new environment. As a family, our five year old son Gary, started primary school in Campbell - the school was right opposite our house in Chauvel Street and the Kindergarten, which was also opposite, was something for Robyn to look forward when she turned three. However, this was not to eventuate as we were posted to Malaysia (Butterworth) in July 1960. In this latter regard I had been annotating my Posting Preferences for Malaysia since the first wave of postings to this new RAAF Base commenced in mid-1958. Coincidentally I had taken over from Flt Lt Fred Watchorn when we moved to Canberra. He had been posted to Butterworth to be Adjutant of the Base Squadron and I was fortunate enough to take over from him again at the conclusion of his Malaysian tour.

There were many exciting prospects associated with a Malaysian posting at that time. First and probably the most attractive being a 12 to 14 day cruise travelling First Class from Sydney to Penang (the normal means of Travel for all overseas postings at that time was by sea - if one was lucky enough to get a postings to the U.K then it meant a much longer cruise of five to six weeks).

Our next door neighbours in Canberra were the Shadforths. Reg, a Sqn Ldr his wife Joan and two children same as with us i.e one boy one girl and both about the same ages too 7 and 4. As an aside here and in respect of ocean travel for RAAF personnel, the Shadforths had just returned from a tour in Malaysia and had travelled both there and back in a P & O liner the "Oronsay". When Reg learned that we were travelling on an Italian ship he quickly commented "You'll have to put up with Spaghetti and Ravioli for the whole cruise"!!. My rejoinder to this was one of being sure that we will be able to cope!!.

Another attractive as part of Conditions of Service involving Far East Postings was the provision of fully furnished Married Quarters, Servants for all ranks e.g for Airmen - a Cook/Ahmah and a part-time Gardener and for Officers - a Cook and an Ahmah as well as a Gardener. Also Penang was a haven for the purchase of either a new car at an almost tax-free price or, if a new car was-out-of-reach, American second-hand cars - generally only 12 months old - were extremely cheap and were readily available.

Having been given almost six months' notice of our posting to Malaysia, we were so preoccupied with planning and expectations that our day-to-day Canberra activities did become somewhat mundane. Suffice it to say that we had so enjoyed Canberra and the A.C.T generally that we would be quite happy to be posted there again in the future. In the meantime we had been advised the details of our Ocean Liner - (they were not referred to as Cruise Ships in those days!). Our ship the " M.V Roma" was being used for the dual purpose of a Migrant ship plying between Genoa and Sydney.as well as for normal ocean cruising passengers. She would come out from Genoa "loaded to "the-Gun whales" with Italian Migrants and then on the return journey, "Back-home" visits for the "home-sick" or by those, who by this time, had become well-heeled successful "New Australians" The "Roma" was of 23,000 tons and ownership of Flotto Laura Lines. She carried about 500 2nd Class passengers and 40 of the 1st Class kind in which we were four of the latter! It wasn't long before we had to sort out what personal effects - (small items) - that we would be entitled to ship to Malaysia with us the remainder having to go into storage in Canberra.

The other major item that was of some concern was the sale of our car, a beautifully preserved Austin A70 (similar to that at right) which in the event I had difficulty in selling. Despite the fact of it being 5 years old it was in "as new" condition and I was apparently asking more than the current market price. I had organised a "last-day-fall-back position" with the best price offered by the Dealers i.e 200 pounds (\$400). In the event fortune smiled on me with an Army officer who had just arrived on posting from South Australia and who was looking for an A70 like mine and who, on sight of the vehicle, was quite prepared to pay me the 275 pounds that I was seeking.



We clinched the deal on the spot.

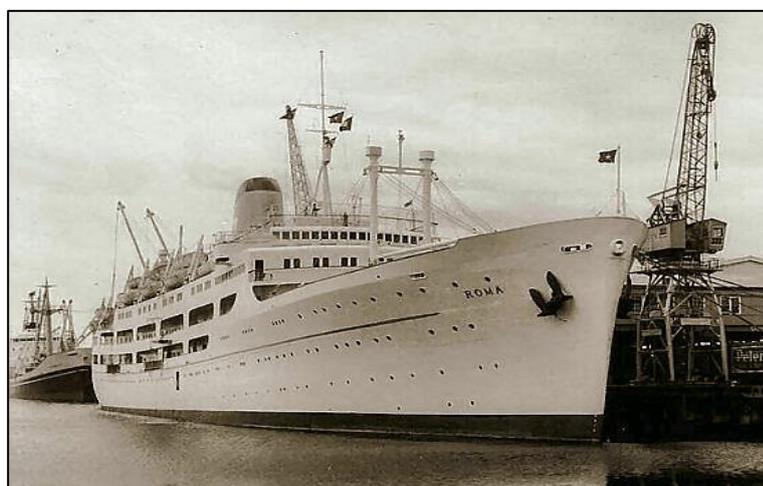
Just prior to departing my office at Russell on my last day in Canberra, I had a visit from Mr Jerry Sebastian whose pictorial skills in the RAAF's Public Relations Office were highly regarded. I had the good fortune of getting to know him early in the piece when I first arrived at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. We also had a mutual interest in Australian Rules Football and its "Mecca" in Melbourne, the M.C.G. In this latter regard he had recently been involved in a rather marvellous centre page photograph in the Melbourne Herald/Sun of a RAAF Sabre aircraft - (piloted by Sqn Ldr Dick Wittman) - as it flew quite gracefully over the M.C.G). Jerry knew about my posting to Butterworth where both No 75 and No 3 Sqn were equipped with the Sabre fighter aircraft and the wisdom in photographs generally being conversation pieces!. He gave me a copy of the photograph accompanied by his advice "frame this Ted and hang it in your office at Butterworth it is sure to make for establishing a quick rapport with any of the visitors to your office and particularly the young Sabre pilots that may, from time to time, need Base Squadron support/assistance. I took his advice and it worked like a charm. In fact it adorned the wall of my many other offices during the rest of my RAAF service.

RAAF LAVERTON'S ARDU SABRE
Piloted by Squadron Leader Dick Wittman
over the MCG. (May 1960) [\(Back\)](#)



Subsequently it has prominently hung on the wall of my various Studies that I have had since my retirement from the RAAF. Jerry's P.R "Philosophy" has really stood the test of time and I have been for-ever grateful to him for his fore-thoughts on my behalf and how the particular photograph has been such a wonderful "conversation piece" and indeed a "door opener" as well.

One of our packing, or not-packing, decisions (???) - that would come back to haunt us on our first night at sea, concerned whether or not to take with our kid's luggage the winter jamas they had been wearing in Canberra? Mattee had said that perhaps we should buy some new ones?. I demurred at this saying that after a few days at sea we would be in warm tropical waters - so we should take the aforesaid jamas, nobody else was going to see them, and then because of their well-worn state when up near Cairns and warmer weather we would throw them out the porthole ì!. And that was our final [\(Back\)](#) decision in the matter.



Now before going any further with our onward movement details from Sydney to Malaysia, and for ease of continuing reference of readers,, I feel that it might be appropriate to first include some details, about the history and activities of the RAAF Base in Malaysia and the reason for its presence,

THE RAAF PRESENCE AT BUTTERWORTH [\(Back\)](#)

During its long history the RAAF has frequently had Units based overseas on operational deployments but only once has it had a permanent or long-term Base outside Australia that it ran and administered as a RAAF Base. This was at Butterworth on the North West coast of the Malayan peninsular opposite the island of Penang, Formerly a Royal Air Force airfield, the Base was handed over to the RAAF in 1955 on free loan from the British Government, which then administered Malaya as a colonial possession. Australian airmen had associated with Butterworth dating back to 1941 when the Base then being used by the RAF for Care and Maintenance purposes- provided respite for the RAAFs No 21 Squadron (equipped with Brewster Buffalo fighters) as it fell back before Japanese forces. Japan took control of the Base for the duration of the War, which the RAF reclaimed after the surrender of the Japanese forces at the end of the War in 1945. Butterworth thereafter became an important refuelling point for RAF aircraft deployed to Singapore and was essential to the maintenance of the Imperial lines of communication.

During the Malayan Emergency of 1948-60 the Base was on an operational footing and hosted a variety of RAF units launching attacks again Communist terrorists in their jungle camps as part of Operation Firedog. In the mid-1950's Britain, Australia and New Zealand agreed to setup a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve on the Malayan Peninsular with the primary aim of countering a growing Communist threat across South East Asia. It was the reserve, rather than the need for additional Forces to support emergency operations. The importance of Butterworth particularly emerged in the 1960s. It provided aircraft and maintenance personnel in support of the deployment of No 79 Sqn to Ubon in Thailand, along with medical and transport support facilities during the Vietnam war (in which No 2 Squadron also committed from 1961). The Base became especially crucial between 1961 and 1967 during the period of Confrontation with Indonesia over the creation of Malaysia, Not only did it give both to the RAAF and RAF the capacity to conduct air defence operations it would have been essential in the mounting of offensive operations against Indonesia had that became necessary.

The end of confrontation allowed the British Government to announce plans shortly thereafter for the withdrawal of their forces under the recently formed policy of East of Suez. In line with an earlier Anglo-Malayan agreement, ownership of Butterworth was transferred to the Malaysian Government in 1970, but the RAAF was immediately given joint control over the Base. After a change of Government in London it was decided that some units from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand should remain in Malaysia/Singapore. Following the signing of a five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA), the RAAF contribution to this Agreement would remain largely unchanged from the previous 15 years, although 78 Wing (now comprising No 3 and No 75 Sqn) had recently been equipped with the Mirage III. Because the new Agreement emphasised air defence, there was no need for No 2 Sqn's Canberras to redeploy to Butterworth so the Squadron returned to its home at Amberley.

The Australian Hostel (known as The Hostie), Radio Station (Radio RAAF Butterworth) and hospital (NO 4 RAAF Hospital) - were central features of life at the Base. The latter was particularly important given that it reportedly facilitated the delivery of 150 babies in one year. A 9 hole (18 tee) golf course was developed behind the Transport Squadron hangar and became a most important feature of sporting and Base morale. The finale of a large RAAF presence at Butterworth was heralded with the transfer of the Air Base from Australian "ownership" to that of Malaysian w.e.f 31st March 1979. and gradually and over the next 9 years all RAAF Units at Butterworth were withdrawn to Australia, leaving behind a small detachment - No 35 Base Support Squadron - (with approx 100 personnel). This was established to provide support for the RAAF regular, but short-term detachments, of Fighter, F111 and Maritime Squadrons exercising from their Australian Bases.

OUR MOVE TO MALAYSIA FROM CANBERRA - JULY 1960 [\(Back\)](#)

Moving day mid July dawned and we headed out to Fairbairn airport for our T.A.A Friendship flight to Sydney where we had arranged a four day breathing space before joining the Roma. We had rented a flat on the ocean-front out at Manly which we thought might ease the excitement and the natural apprehensions re the first Ocean travel and particularly with 2 small children



Fl Lt and Mrs Ted Ilton with children Gary (5) and Robyn (2) on posting to Base Squadron Butterworth, in Malaysia, from Dept of Air Canberra, mid 1960. Leaving their MQ in Chauvel St, Campbell in the ACT on the way to Fairbairn airport for their flight to Sydney where they would join their ship M.V. Roma (Flotto Lauro Line) for the 12 day voyage to Singapore, then rail to Penang. [\(Back\)](#)



A farewell wave to family and friends at Fairbairn Airport. ([Back](#))

We did so much enjoy our four days over at Manly, being mid-winter we were in no way inclined to test the waters of the Manly surf beach which was just across the road from our flat. However, we did get a bit of a feel for some form of “sea-legs” at this time given the several Manly ferry trips we did enjoy, not only the ever changing harbour scenery but also the many tourist sights of Sydney.

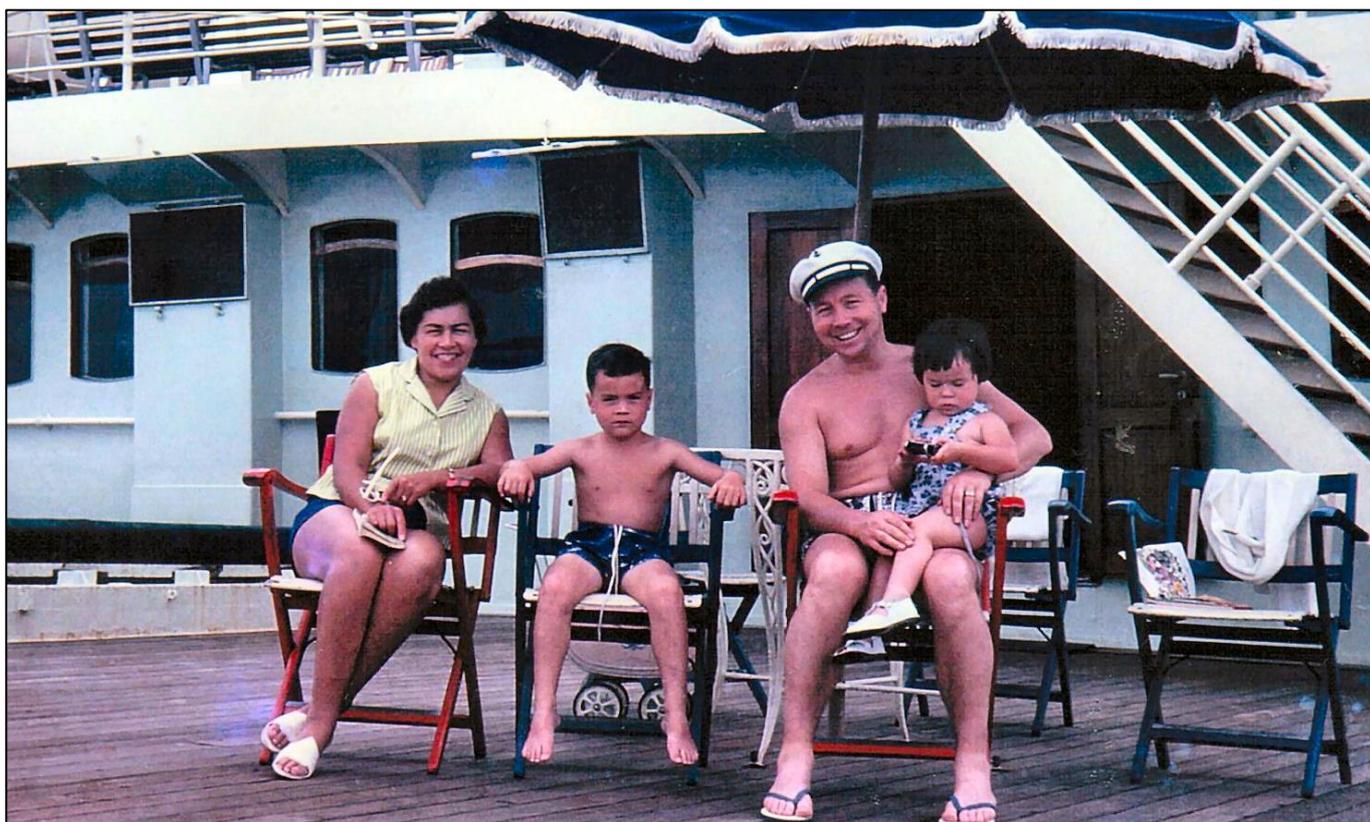
On the fourth day of our overseas “odyssey” we were introduced to the RAAF Movement Office personnel whose task it was to drive us from Manly to Circular Quay to join the MV Roma, They were rather wonderful with their guiding us through the Customs, Health and Immigration formalities. That being done, they then took us on board ship, and showed us around before taking us to our two adjoining cabins - First Class on the Promenade deck. Our intentions were that Robyn would share a cabin with her Mum and Gary with me.

ON BOARD AT LAST AND ADVENTURES AT SEA ON THE “ MV ROMA ”

([Back](#))

We set sail at sunset down that beautiful Sydney Harbour with the ship’s Band quite emotive playing of “Arriève-aderchi-Roma”. It was indeed a wonderful experience for Mattee and me and in their own way, the kids as well. A great way to begin our twelve day cruise to Singapore.

The first night was the Captain's "farewell to Sydney Dinner" in the First Class Dining Room a "black-tie" affair. I wore my Air Force formal dress uniform and we sat up at our table as if we were already seasoned world travellers when, just after the soup had been served, we wondered how the two kids were getting on with their female Cabin Attendant? The arrangement for children dining on board was an early meal at about five p.m. then a "romp" in the Nursery until the parents went to dinner at 7 p.m. at which time the ship's "nurse-maids" tucked in the children and waited in their cabin until the parents returned. We had also arranged for them to sleep in the same cabin until we returned from dinner. Our wonderment on this score was soon answered with some very loud laughter from the other 38 diners. We laughed too as if we knew the reason for the merriment until when turning around quickly we saw with considerable dismay, the cause of the laughter!! There standing at the door to the dining room, were our two "littlies" conspicuously arrayed in their very "ragged" pyjamas which I had earlier asserted "nobody except us would see"! Apparently, according to the distressed Maid who had also by this time appeared on the scene advising us that the children were asleep when she went to check on other children and while away Robyn must have awoken crying and asking for her "Mummy". To give credit to our 5 year-old Gary, he had fortunately remembered the dining room locale from our lunch-time visit, and quickly hurried there with little Robyn to seek the comfort of Mum and Dad! (the offending pyjamas were that very night "buried-at-sea" with little or no formality.



*What a way to go on a posting!!
Ted with wife Mattee and children
Gary aged 5 and Robyn aged 2. ([Back](#))*

As the rest of the voyage progressed we were constantly reminded of the hugeness of Australia when we noted the Country's coastline still remaining in sight for at least the first four days. The weather remained fine for the entire voyage and became warmer as we entered the Tropics

encroaching nearness of the Equator. This change meant we spent more time in the air-conditioned comfort of the ship and less time out on deck. I also hasten to comment on the Italian cuisine, very new to us but most “mouth-watering” (and midriff bulging) which made me think of the earlier warning from Reg Shadforth and perhaps my now appropriate rejoinder of “hey Reg - eat your heart out”!

We soon developed a daily “ship-board” routine and loved every minute of it. The latter made easier all round by the smoothness of the ocean. Moreover, as Italians being universally known as lovers of children, the appropriate ship’s crew members reminded parents with accompanying children that they did not have to plan anything for the children’s enjoyment for the entire voyage “this is the Crew’s Duty”!

Both Mattee’s and my enjoyment of the ships facilities was evident for the entire voyage and we did feel quite saddened on day 12 when we sailed into the Singapore harbour knowing that cruising in an ocean liner was a great experience, and sadly was at its finale for us, at least on this occasion

THE BEGINNING OF THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE, THE GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL

The ship disembarkment in Singapore to eventual arrival in Penang some six hundred miles north - at that time (1960) - did happen and eventuate rather quickly. The normal practice then was for RAAF arrivals, coupled with the friendly and efficiency of the on-hand RAAF Movements Staff, when once cleared through Customs and Immigration, to proceed to awaiting buses or taxis. These soon whisked them to the Singapore airport and the awaiting Malaysian Air Line’s Boeing 737 direct flight to Bayan Lepas airport at Penang. In our case, I had earlier premonitions about the seeming too-quick



exposure for us, and our two little “kids”, from conditioned ship’s [\(Back\)](#) comfort to an almost instant “immersion” into the equatorial heat of Singapore and Malaysia. With this in mind I had asked if arrangements could be made for continuing our journey from Singapore to Penang by train. In so doing I had checked to find that we would have an overnight in Singapore (in an air-conditioned Hotel) followed by a 24 hour air-conditioned train ride (with Sleepers) to our destination in Malaysia. This request was agreed to which included an overnight stay in the “Goodwood Park” Hotel in Orchard Road Singapore from whence we were able to have a quick look at the city of Singapore.

We even had time to look at some of the Motor Car showrooms and checked-out the availability and price of second-hand US cars. We were hoping the proceeds from the sale of our Austin A70 (about M\$1500) would go a long way towards the purchase of a good second-hand US car. The Salesmen gave us some encouraging signs when saying that prices in Penang for used US cars were even better than Singapore.

Our train departure time from Singapore was early in the morning and we were delighted to find a quite luxurious train on our arrival at the Station. There were three classes of travel and we quickly noted that our First Class Cars were particularly luxurious, Club Car, Dining Car and Sleeping Cars. In the event we were the only travellers in First Class and we were really looking forward to what looked to be a certainty for a most comfortable and enlightening train ride. Coupled with this would be the added benefit of a constantly changing landscape as we journeyed up through the Malaysian archipelago. Kuala Lumpur was about the half-way mark and which we reached late in the afternoon. The Kuala Lumpur railway station was really something to see with its rather beautiful Moorish Architecture, indeed an eye-opening gargantuan structure. As well as a rail junction facility it also housed a magnificent Hotel. Our stop was for a period of four hours - (5pm-9pm) - so we managed to hire a hotel room for the period - changed into fresh clothing and even hired an air-conditioned taxi for an hour or so for a closer look at the city of K L.

Following this we had a great evening meal in our hotel room, experiencing for the first time the “master/servant” relationship that had been well established under the many years of British Colonial rule. There were at least four waiters looking after us. After dinner, the “kids” were changed into their pyjamas, Ahmahs were on hand to help us with this, (as if we needed them) and we re-joined the train at about 8.45 pm. Our beds were quite comfortable and again we were well served with attending staff both at the going-to-bed stage and the awakening in the morning with cup of tea and bikkies!

As indicated earlier in these writings, we were heading for Penang - an island about 5 kms from the mainland at Butterworth - the latter being the “getting off” Station for Penang. At about 9 a.m we left this rather



delightful train and joined a ferry that would take us over to Penang - about a 45 minute trip. On arrival at the Penang wharf which was actually part of the Penang Railway Station the absence of any signs of a railway was quite bewildering as too was the ambient and uncomfortable on-land temperature at that, and every other hour of the day (and night).

The low-tide level and associated smelly muddy appearance of the “harbour” waters did not really predetermine any ideas of tropical splendour. As with Sydney departure and Singapore arrival the RAAF Movements people were again on hand to efficiently assist us from the Railway ferry to our Hotel, which turned out to be the glorious water-front Eastern and Oriental Hotel - or the “E&O” as it was affectionately called by all who visited “her”. The best way I can

describe this great establishment, now some 50 years on, is it was built by the same architects/builders as those involved with Singapore's "Raffles Hotel" and was built in the late 1890's?. (of interest, both "Raffles" and the "E&O" were extensively refurbished in the early 21st century with great care taken to maintain their original style coupled with the urgent need for such "mod cons" as improved electricity wiring, plumbing and air conditioning).



The E & O Hotel Penang ([Back](#))

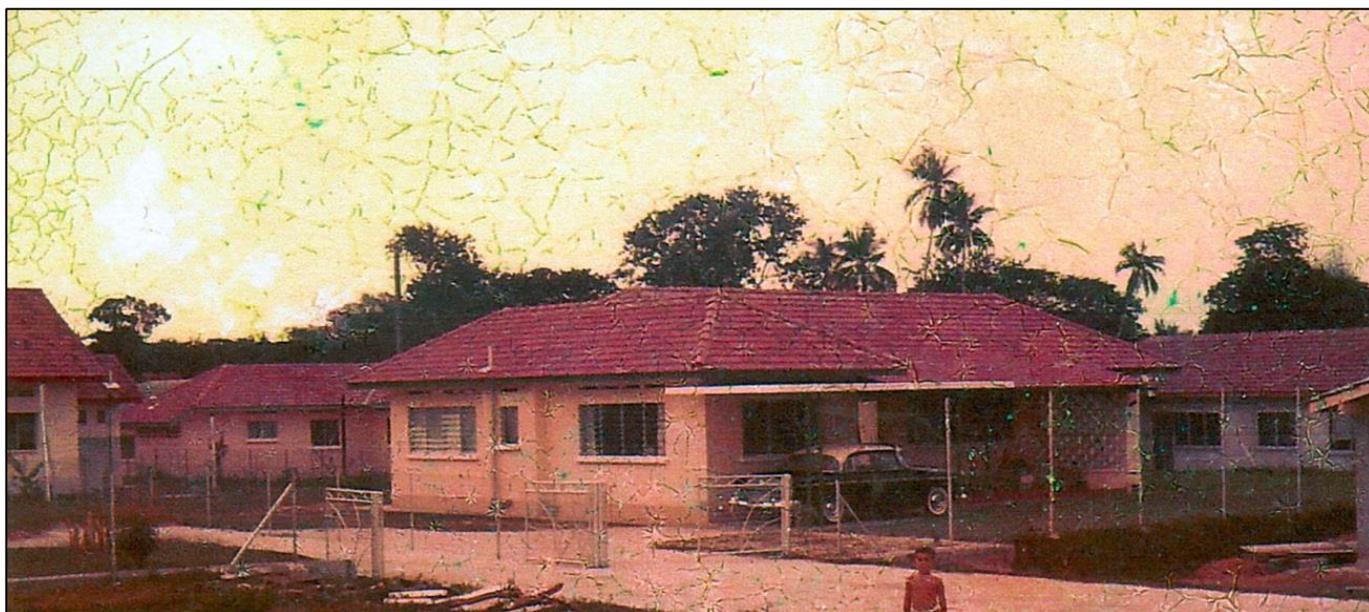
Readers will recall the earlier chapters of this book concerning Conditions of Service for those married RAAF personnel on posting to Malaya and in particular the provision of fully furnished married quarters (M.Q's) most of which were located on Penang Island. Moreover and as a general rule, the departure-for-Australia personnel continued to occupy their particular MQ until their departure date, which meant that the arriving families had to be hotel accommodated, officers and their families were destined for the "E&O" and all other ranks "The Australian Hostel". Generally the period involved was no longer than 2 weeks at which time a seeming "mass exodus" was joining a ship from Penang back to Australia. Also considering the numbers involved, RAAF personnel strength at Butterworth at times numbered something nearing 2000 therefore it is not hard to imagine that there was a particularly large number of RAAF personnel administering Hotel, and MQ activities and not forgetting the hiring of servants which, in the 60's, was arranged for all new Arrivals. We had nearly three weeks in the E&O and it was really a "something" experience. This also gave us the opportunity to "normalise" to some extent the habits of the local - and also still very strong English Colonial elements of the Malay scene. Clubs servicing these elements were a "must" to join. Undoubtedly Penang Swimming Club membership was quickly sought by all ranks (an only "white-faced" Membership was even then an evident initial requirement for Membership).

Other Clubs on Penang Island included the Penang Sports Club, again, but less prominent for this Club, "white-faced" membership was definitely the strongest, however the tri-race Malay population, particularly the more wealthy Chinese, Indian and a lesser number (few in fact) of Malays were among the Sports Club Membership. The main sports being lawn-tennis, rugby, cricket and squash.

The Penang Club was, at the time-frame under discussion, definitely something out of the "memoires of Somerset Maugham" with its very English "pucka" membership. However and

despite this, the criteria for membership seemed to include a more-like Chamber of Commerce type i.e; people being representative of all nationalities. Another club-like activity for officers and their families was the use of “The Runnymede” a few miles along from the E&O and abutting the waterfront of the Penang Harbour which faced straight across to the mainland which, on a clear day had Butterworth on the distant horizon. This edifice was indeed a quite popular spot of a Saturday morning being a great “watering hole” following a morning’s shopping in Georgetown. (Quite sadly were the long term inhabitants who spoke with considerable authority and anguish of the many Japanese beheading atrocities against POW’s under that tree still outside what was then the Japanese Army Head Quarters.)

As I was only a Flight Lieutenant during this posting, 1960-1963 (I was lucky enough to have a second in 1972-74) and because my appointment as Adjutant of the Base Squadron did not make it necessary for me to have an on-Base MQ, we were quickly looking forward to lots of living-on-Penang-Island opportunities to utilise the Clubs mentioned above, each of which being virtually on our door step. We had been allocated a MQ in the “leafy suburb” of Jesselton within seeming stepping-stone distance of each. Our MQ was almost brand-new and had been purpose-built as RAAF Officer accommodation.



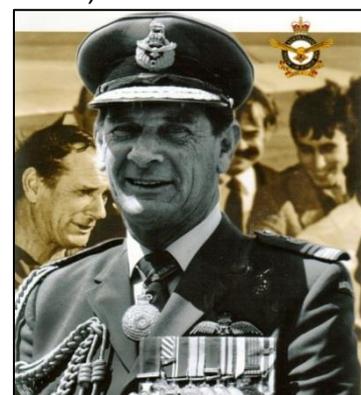
Housing for accompanied Australian Servicemen in Malaysia. ([Back](#))

As already indicated above, another Condition of Service arising from a Malaysian posting was the provision of suitable fully furnished, standard housing. “Suitable” was taken to mean similar to a standard for which European persons had been accustomed. Ever since the start of Colonialisation of Malaya, Europeans had enjoyed a very high standard in housing and this condition had been continued. After “Malayanisation” in the 1950’s, which resulted in many British company managers and Civil Servants returning home, there were many “mansion-style” homes left vacant and as the locals could not afford the rental or purchase price, nearly every one of them was “snapped up” by the Australian Government as rental accommodation for RAAF accompanied Officers. Even with these available houses, there was still a gap to meet the expected “onslaught” of Australian servicemen in late 1950 so it wasn’t long before Chinese developers took advantage of the situation and built many new homes to meet the housing shortfall required by both accompanied Officers and Airmen.



Also, available land on the mainland, near the Base, was not available so the majority of accompanied RAAF families were housed on Penang Island. ([Back](#))

The previous occupant of the house allocated to us was Sqn Ldr David Evans - (a subsequent CAS 1982 AC DSO AFC right), his wife Gail and their two teen-age daughters. They had only occupied the house for several months until opting for a larger quarter. The Jesselton area was one of many suburbs on Penang Island where suitable existing Houses - (even Mansions) - had been left un-occupied by the large number of ex-patriotes (British and European) following the recent "Merdeka" - (Malayanisation of the former British Colony in 1957). These were in the main Senior Executive homes for the many expatriates that had occupied Penang Island businesses during Colonisation. In fact they became the standard Condition-of-Service style houses for the Australian RAAF/Army/Navy officers who were posted to the Penang and/or Butterworth area. As mentioned earlier, other than unaccompanied personnel, or defined "on-Base" Married Quarters for essential-on-Base 24/7 personnel - at least 90% of accompanied accommodation (ie married members with families) had to be found on Penang Island. Most of these were at least as good as the equivalent Australian living standards and in the case of Married officers, the available standard provided for previous CEO accommodation was of a standard much higher than one was ([Back](#)) accustomed to in Australia.



Generally at the time of our posting to Malaysia in 1960 a special RAAF Housing Officer post (with staff) was responsible for housing allocation, with the more than likelihood of a particular house being occupied by the incumbent's replacement. So there was - with the huge variety of

housing types a bit of a “luck of the draw” situation. Our first housing allocation prompted by that of Sqn Ldr Evan’s departure to a larger house was none-the-less more than suitable for our needs. The area was a delight with dozens of houses built for the Colonial period and even a bit “North-shore-ish” as in Sydney or Toorak in Melbourne! The two houses in our Court had been built for RAAF needs and fronted on to a vacant lot which looked over towards the Race Course and the heavily wooded Penang Hill. It was only due to the subsequent (six months later) erection on the vacant lot of a huge Residence for the Dutch Consulate that led to our departure. The occupants’ servant quarters on our boundary fence had privacy problems and the only way to confront the problem was to seek another house. We did want to stay in the Jesselton area and it was quite a number of weeks before we did find something else as there were no immediate House vacancies in the RAAF Housing Office. In the meantime, the only thing we could do was to keep an eye out in the local paper for House to Rent and preferably in the Jesselton area would have to be of officer standard. As well as being fully furnished to RAAF standards, the rental for the house had to be no more than that payable for Officer Hirings to the RAAF - from memory \$400.00 Malay per month.

In the meantime our first priority was tracking down a good second-hand American car! We had studied new Used Car Lots for a couple of weeks - looking particularly for a fairly new Chevrolet or similar, but without immediate success. Our purchasing power being limited to M\$1500.00 and we could not find anything decent for this price. Then, as they say “Fortune Favours the Brave” or in this case “the lucky”. The “Luck” being someone else’s and as it turned out and would be more of a “bad luck” story for the vendor who happened to be a RAAF W/Off living in MQ out at the RAAF Air Base whose name was W.Off Mason. I found out about the car from the RAAF Base Senior Accountant Officer (Sqn Ldr “Snub” Pollard) in the Base Squadron HQ where I also had my office. I had not seen “Snub” since 1950 when we was a Flying Officer at Ballarat when I a Sgt. He was my badminton mentor and also the person who had introduced me to my wife-to-be, Mattee Hayes also as you may recall a keen Badminton player!. I first met Snub on this occasion a week or so after I had begun in my new job as Adjutant of the Base Squadron. He asked me the question put to all new arrivals, “what kind of a car are you going to buy, new or second hand”. My response was “second-hand American and preferably a Chev” to which he replied “I’ll keep my eyes and ears open for you”.

This he did for a few days later he called me down to his office and said he had heard of “ just the car for me a 1956 Chev, \$400 Aust”. “Snub” then went on to say “W.Off Mason purchased his car 6 months ago I think a 1956 Chevvie and sadly he was admitted to our RAAF hospital a couple of days ago and has just been advised that he has T.B and needs to be med-evacced back to Australia as soon as possible. He will not be able to arrange shipment of his car to Australia unless he is prepared to pay import duty which would be significant (the “Rules” at that time were that one had to own the car for at least 18 months before being able to import at Duty Free into Australia. Snub suggested that I call over to the Hospital and arrange to talk to the Warrant Officer with a view to making an offer. I did [\(Back\)](#) this and he first said to me that I should have a look at the car first and suggested I call at his MQ and view it in his garage.



This I did it was not a Chevie but a 1956 Dodge (above) but I told him I would like to buy it. He said he would want Australian currency and I told him that I only had \$400.00. He said he would want more than that in normal circumstances but would accept my offer. The money changed hands and I owned this beautiful car for seven years before trading it in on a late Model Chevie in Penrith in 1967. More of the car later particularly the damage incurred in sea shipment back to Australia but now back to the “house hunting”!. Fortunately for us we found a rather wonderful 2 storey house in Jesselton Road about a block from where we were living. It had four bedrooms, two bathrooms and double garage. It was on a beautifully manicured half acre lot, the former occupier had been the General Manager of the Rotterdam Trading Company for Malaysia. He was in the throes of leaving Penang for Holland and quickly agreed to my viewing and possible renting of the property which he had been trying to let for some months. He said I could have it for as long as it was owned by his Company @ M\$300 per month (\$100 cheaper than what the RAAF was paying for officer accommodation). He also said he would sell the furniture and effects to me for M\$1000.00. I agreed, subject to RAAF Housing Office approval. This was soon forthcoming having regard to the generous costs and “fully-furnished” aspects.



Our second house, this one in Jesselton Road. ([Back](#))

As with any suburban residential complex, changes in circumstances were just as likely and as prevalent, as in one's normal neighbourhood “back home”. Consequently, changes in occupancy, although not a daily occurrence, were not uncommon in the RAAF housing situation in Malaysia. Additionally, due to circumstances where some houses were grander than others, some coveting attitudes by others “not so lucky” were inevitable although indefensible due to the “luck of the draw” at any given time. This aspect was not acceptable as a reason for wanting to move. In the Ilton family case, the first house allotted and occupied by them became untenable due to next door neighbour incompatibility. The application for a move to another house was approved conditional upon them finding their own alternate and that the

standards, rent, furnishing etc being the same as for RAAF “pool” houses. The house they located (above) was the former house of the Rotterdam Trading Company’s General Manager.

We were so happy when we moved in and remained so for twelve months during which time we became particularly friendly with our neighbours Peter Gemke and his wife Ans. Peter was the Manager of the Netherlands Trading Bank, they had no children at that time and became very attached and attentive to our two “nippers”. We were all constant participants in Lawn Tennis activities at the Penang Sports Club which was only a few minutes away. One of the highlights of this, which is still held with great pleasure in our memories, was the frequency of our playing tennis with the Sultan of Kedah, who on more than one occasion offered us a weekend in his week-end “Bungalow” atop of Kedah Peak - a beautifully cool locale at about 4,000 feet above sea level. The biggest Bungalow that we had ever seen with its many rooms and other attractions.

We were indeed greatly chastened when a sale eventuated for our house in Jesselton Road! An Indian wharf labourer won the Malaysian lottery and promptly purchased the house and was eager to move in. Again, our luck held. I heard a house in Western Road - two or three blocks away was becoming vacant. Similar to the Jesselton Road house, it belonged to a European Company, Sime Darby, and had been the residence of the General Manager. Not two storey, not as big and structurally opulent edifice but was on nearly an acre of land and again still quite magnificent on our standards! As you can imagine, although initially devastated about moving again, we soon settled in. Another feature of this house was it being right next door to the Masonic Hall of which I was able to transfer my Australian membership. Also this Hall was utilised during the day as an International Kindergarten, in which we quickly enrolled our 3 year old Robyn. Gary had been enrolled in the RAAF School, a converted Chinese Mansion (right) and only two or three blocks away. This too was very much a temporary schooling arrangement while a purpose-built RAAF school was being established out past Tanjong Bungah and which began service later in 1960. While this School’s enrolment was in the early hundreds when first occupied, when we returned for our second tour of Malaysia in 1972, the numbers had grown to 1400. A large contingent of Australian teachers also swelled the numbers of Aussies in Penang at that time. [\(Back\)](#)



Now back to our first few weeks in Malaysia. We were settled into our house, with a “new” car in the garage coupled with a getting-used-to having Servants in the house and our children attending their “new” kindergarten and school. The daily routine of RAAF service was also a bit different to the Australian scene where one found one’s own way to daily duty! In our current situation with the RAAF Base being on the mainland and 90% of the uniformed staff living on Penang Island, there was a rather momentous and lengthy daily (Monday to Friday) transport logistic operation to be met. All non-commissioned members were bus-picked-up at their houses each morning at virtual “sun-up” to be conveyed to a RAAF contracted ferry in nearby Georgetown, a 20 minute ride across the harbour to the Butterworth ferry terminal, followed by another approx 20 minute bus-ride to the Base. The reverse situation occurred at about 1600 hours each working day. Another complication, during the outward journey was the need to go through Customs at the Butterworth ferry terminal because, Penang at that time, was still a Duty-free port. Officers were also part of this transport logistics operation except they had the

extra “comfort” and “pleasure” of a Taxi pick-up service at their door for the ride to the ferry and again on the return to the ferry in the afternoon. In most cases, rather battered old and very noisy, diesel operated taxis were used for this purpose.

**The Penang
Passenger/Vehicular Ferries.**
[\(Back\)](#)

It does not take much imagination to wonder how reliably and operationally the system worked during stand-down hours. At night or weekends, should there be an operational emergency at the Base and with 90% of RAAF personnel being ensconced in their own houses on Penang Island there was a real problem alerting necessary staff. The Base did have a commercial-type Radio Station - “Radio RAAF Butterworth” which no doubt could exercise an emergency alert system of - RETURN TO BASE! However the weakness of this system was whether or not those necessary staff would have their radios turned on at the time. To overcome this communication weakness, during stand-down times alerts were ‘broadcast’ by having a Dakota from No 2 Sqn fly low over Penang Island RAAF residential areas opening and closing its throttles.

**Evening transport from ferry,
Hillside, Penang. 1966.**
[\(Back\)](#)

Now, having exercised the early weeks of getting “our” Malaysian “domestic” act together, coupled with the safety of morning get-to-work triangular transportation system despite the local traffic which tended to move with something of an impatient frenzy, first impressions on arrival at the



Base suggested tidiness and efficiency together with an expectation of operational activity.

The latter was effected by the seeming “immediacy” of the start-up of aircraft jet engines i.e Canberras of No 2 Squadron and Sabres of No’s 3 and 77 Sqn (No 78 Wing). Sounds which echoed around the Base for most of the working day and often at night with frequent programmed operations



2 Squadron RAAF Canberras depart for Vietnam - 1967 ([Back](#))



76 Wing RAAF Sabres – 1967. ([Back](#))

Other RAAF aircraft were represented by a Flight of Dakotas (C Flight at No 2 Sqn) and several Huey Helicopters. Added to this were the once or twice weekly sounds of the visiting RAAF Base Richmond's C130s from No 36 and No 37 Sqns. Each of the above Butterworth RAAF Squadrons were embodied into No 478 Wing. Additionally their maintenance needs, up to and including "E" servicings, were provided by No 481 Maintenance Squadron at Butterworth.



2 Squadron RAAF Dakota and RAF refuelling truck with RNZAF C-130 - 1966

The Base Squadron provided domestic Base services such as Air Traffic Control, Supply, Pay and Allowances, Catering, Ground Transport, Welfare. Barracks, Chaplaincy, Photographic and Provost. Two other Services that would normally be provided were Medical and Airfield Security both of which, at Butterworth were separately provided by No 4 RAAF Hospital for the former, and either an Australian Army Company or U.K based Company on a quarterly rotational basis.

Senior Executive leadership during my time at Butterworth, and as far as I can provide from my memory, were :-

Air Base Cdr's
Base Sqn Cdr's
No 478 Wing
No 478 Mntce Sqn Cdr's
Fighter Sqn Cdr's

Air Cdre's Ford and Hartnell
GpCapt's Joske and Dowling
GpCapt's Rose and Kinninmont
WgCdr's McKeown and Mahoney
WgCdr's Hubble and Glassop

Aircraft of the Royal Air Force with its "Far East" National Defence posture, were also a continuing part of RAAF Base Butterworth's Strategic Reserve commitment with aircraft such as RAF Valettas, Hastings, Beverly's and Bristol Freighters being a daily presence. Additionally, as part of Great Britain's Far East Air Force policy at that time, the RAF also provided, on a six week deployment basis, elements of its V-Force Bombers e.g - Valiants, Victors and Vulcans which continued until mid (?) 1960 when the British policy of withdrawal of its forces East of Suez was actuated.



RAF Vulcan landing at RAAF Butterworth – 1966. ([Back](#))

An amusing incident occurred during the last weeks of this long-standing visitation by elements of the visiting V-Force aircraft. The RAAF OC at Butterworth, at that time being Air Cdre Geoff Hartnell, had arranged with a Penang embroidering expert - as a measure of "RAAF Base gratitude to the RAF "V" Force", the manufacture in a similar form as a Queen's Colour Standard which would appropriately portray, in rather beautiful Standard-style embroidery the Squadron Crests of each of the three V Force RAF aircraft which had been in "residence" at Butterworth for the preceding three to four years. A suitable time for presentation of this Standard was to be at a Dining-In Night at the RAAF Butterworth Officers' Mess and coinciding with the last day of these visits when it would be presented to the Commanding Officer of the departing RAF V Bomber Wing.

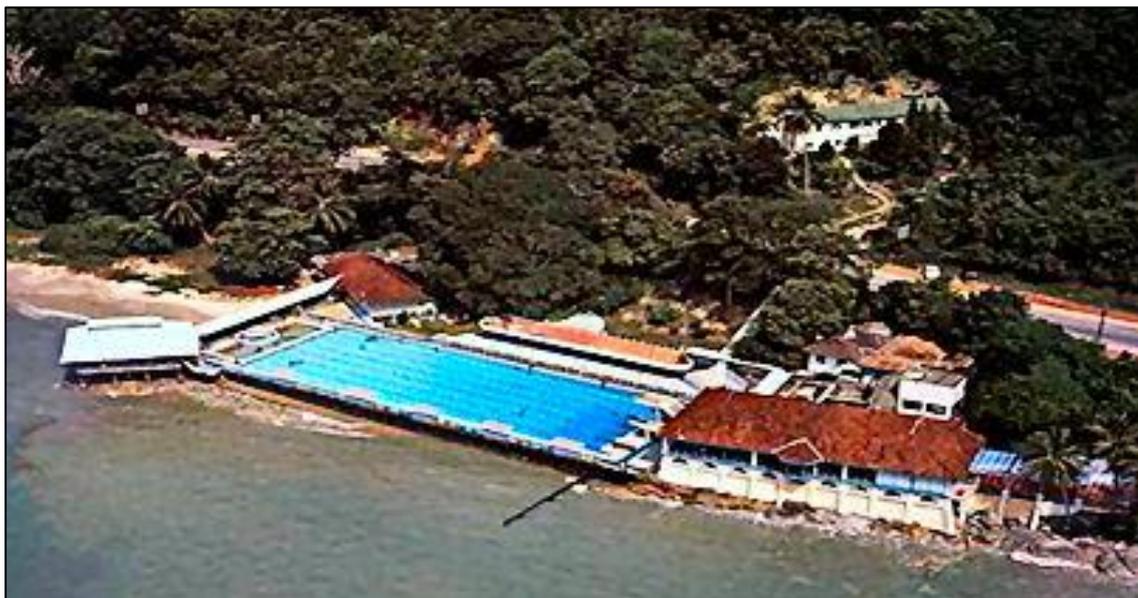
However, and unbeknown to any one present at this Dinner (and in particular the OC!) a young RAAF fighter pilot from 478 Wing had heard about the manufacture of this "presento". He, for some reason or other, did not share the same affection for the Royal Air Force as the purposely planned dining in night occasion was intended to manifest. He had ascertained by means of his own endeavours to locate the Penang Standard "artificer" with whom he then confronted, on the supposed behalf of the OC, some wording to be worked into the otherwise blank reverse side of the Standard. The additional wording to be emblazoned thereon and in large red lettering;

"All Pommies are Bastards"

It was unfortunate that because of this extra work to be done, the "Standard" was not delivered to the Officers' Mess until a seeming few minutes before the OC was to make the presentation to the Royal Air Force Wing Commander sitting at his side at the dining table. The "quick look", that was to be made by the OC's aide before the Standard was brought into the Mess dining-room, was one occasioned just to a look at the front of the Standard on which all appeared fully in order!. Even when presented by the O.C to the RAF WgCdr with the front of the Standard looking back to the top-table and the rear to the assembled throng, nothing appeared amiss until those so assembled broke into impromptu laughter. A quick look by the top-table diners brought a thankful sigh of relief when the Guest joined in with the rest of the diners with laughter and the thought that both sides of the Standard were as intended. The sincerity of the front side and some lighter reactions when reading the obverse and some light banter with the obverse. Nonetheless the ire of the OC - and still "on the boil" next morning he traced the miscreant word innovator who, and for his pains, had his tour to Butterworth immediately

ceased as confirmed by his acceptance for a seat in the next Hercules to Australia. As far as I have been able to since ascertain, the “sullied” Standard has continued to have a most proud and prominent place in the V Force - or whatever it is now called - Officers’ Mess.

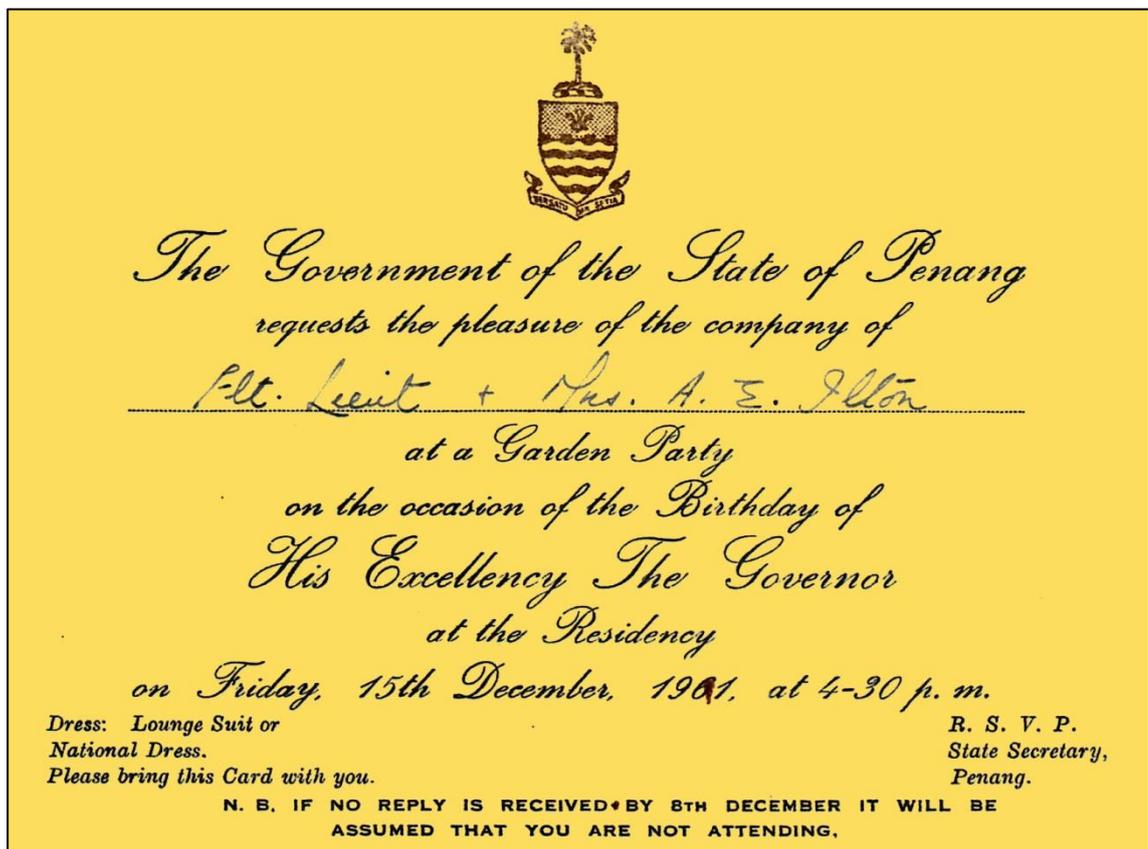
Whilst on the subject of Officer’s Messes, mention needs to be made of the other Messes as well i.e. the Sergeants Mess (all Senior NCO’s - Sgts, Flt Sgts and Warrant Officers) and the Airmen’s Mess (Corporals, Leading Aircraftmen and Aircraftmen) each providing in addition to the various meals of the day, a Centre for regular Social programmes. The system at RAAF Base Butterworth went even further with the Penang Island “RAAF personnel-serviced” Social Centres as mentioned earlier i.e. the Runnymede for Officers and families, “The Snows Club” for Senior NCO’s and Warrant Officers and the Australian Hostel (“Hostie”) for junior NCO’s and airmen families. Additionally on-Base facilities such as the RAAF Boat Club (“The Boatie”) and an embryo (1962) RAAF Golf Club were extremely popular locales for off-duty activities. More detail for the latter will be provided in later chapters of this story and in particular how it had expanded from a three hole course in the early 1960’s to an “Eighteen hole” (18 tees and 9 greens) plus Club House facility in the late 1960’s and in fact became not only a most suitable sporting facility for all ranks but a great social centre as well. I have already mentioned in an earlier chapter in this book, the rather unique non-usage of a member’s Rank in the Sporting arenas where both commissioned and non-commissioned personnel were Members. This unusual “familiarity” pattern was never abused first names (even the bolder nicknames) were universally used within the confines of the Social/Sporting facility once away from the facility the Service Custom of ranks and their various levels and address manners again obtained.



Penang Swimming Club, Tanjong Bungaq, Penang. 1966 ([Back](#))

Social matters for RAAF personnel and their families were not confined to those sponsored and made available as a Condition of RAAF Service in Malaysia. Attachment to, in particular on Penang Island, organised Social/Sporting Clubs were encouraged both by the local Community as well as RAAF encouragement, The Penang Club for Officers, The Penang Sports Club and the Penang Swimming Club were quite widely used by all ranks and their families. In fact RAAF personnel were soon represented on Club Committees replacing the engendered Malayanisation gap.

As my family and I were residing on Penang Island, I was quick to follow the Social Custom of expatriates from other countries and as taught at our Officer Training Schools i.e. the paying of a Courtesy "Call" to the Local Establishment. This to be effected by a visit soon after arrival to the Gatehouse of the Local Head of Government - i.e. the Governor's residence. The "Call" was simply executed by a signing of the Visitor's Book at the Gatehouse, moreover as an indication of a willingness to be involved in the local Social Set a return to the Gatehouse within a period of 6 weeks and with a second signing of the book on that occasion would result in a subsequent occasion(s) invitation to whatever Social function would match the Social level of the signatory. I duly did this and just a few weeks after the second signing received an invitation for my wife Mattee and me to attend a Governor's Consular Garden Party at the Governor's Residency. The level of the occasion was determined pretty much by the level of the Signatory. I assumed that as a Flight Lieutenant I equalled that of a Consular staff member. No doubt the signing of the book by the Officer Commanding of the RAAF Base, an Air Commodore, would dictate invitations to say Ambassadorial level functions?. I hasten to say that by the period in time that I was involved British Governors of Penang had been replaced by a local Malay Governor.



[\(Back\)](#)



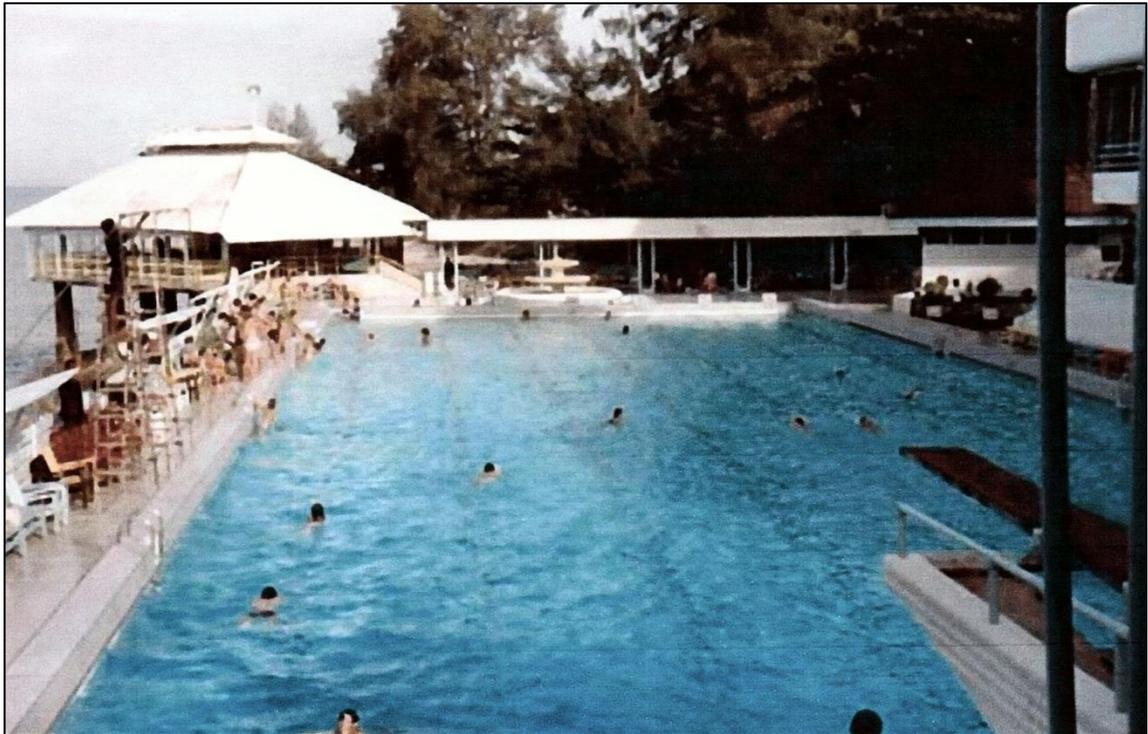
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L to R from centre: Jagjit Singh and wife Lottie (India Consulate), Ken Bantock and wife (Betty (British Consulate), Ted Ilton and wife Mattee (RAAF), Eng Wan (Hong Kong), Name forgotten, (Consulate - N.Z), Name forgotten, (Consulate – Karanda), Singh and wife (name forgotten) (Pakistan Consulate).

What really made the actuating of this “Social-Calling” Custom so very much worthwhile was the accompanying Invitees that were at our table of ten. Consular reps and their wives were from the countries of Germany, Great Britain, India, Pakistan and Australia and as could be expected we each exchanged “Business Cards” which resulted in the weeks that followed invitations to their own Consular Social occasion, whether on a large scale or only a small dinner party. They were wonderful people with whom we developed lasting friendships following our return to our own countries.

As will be noted in photographs which follow, we did spend a lot of time at both the Sports Club and the Penang Swimming Club in both of which I was to serve as a Committee-man during most of my time in Malaysia i.e 1960 to 1963. By the time that the second wave of RAAF members were in Malaysia (1960) most of the British Civilian and Service elements (British) repatriated to the U.K., the previous Civil Servant elements being replaced by Malaysians and the senior Commercial elements particularly the rather vast Indian and Chinese families quickly replaced the departing UK members

The RAAF members filled what could have been described as the Defence “vacuum” and as most of the local Clubs no longer had the UK element, and the local Chinese, Indian and Malays were not eligible for this “silver-spooned” Membership, the RAAF element within these Clubs soon became the major office bearers of one or more Clubs. What was of interest too at the time was the Constitutional amendments permitting membership to local people!



Penang Swimming Club [\(Back\)](#)



Penang Sports Club members. 1962. [\(Back\)](#)

The mix of European and local Malaysian members, (ie: Chinese, Malay and Indian) can be seen in this pic. I'm in the middle row, 4th from left and Mattee is 6th from the left, front row. Tennis was played on beautiful lawn courts, mainly late in the afternoon until dusk, the cooler hours. Every game was attended by small Tamil ball boys. Turbaned waiters were hovering with cool drinks, the popular one being fresh lime, either during or at the end of a game. The Sultan of kedah was a regular player and mixed readily with other members.

Squash courts were also available as was Rugby, Hockey and cricket.

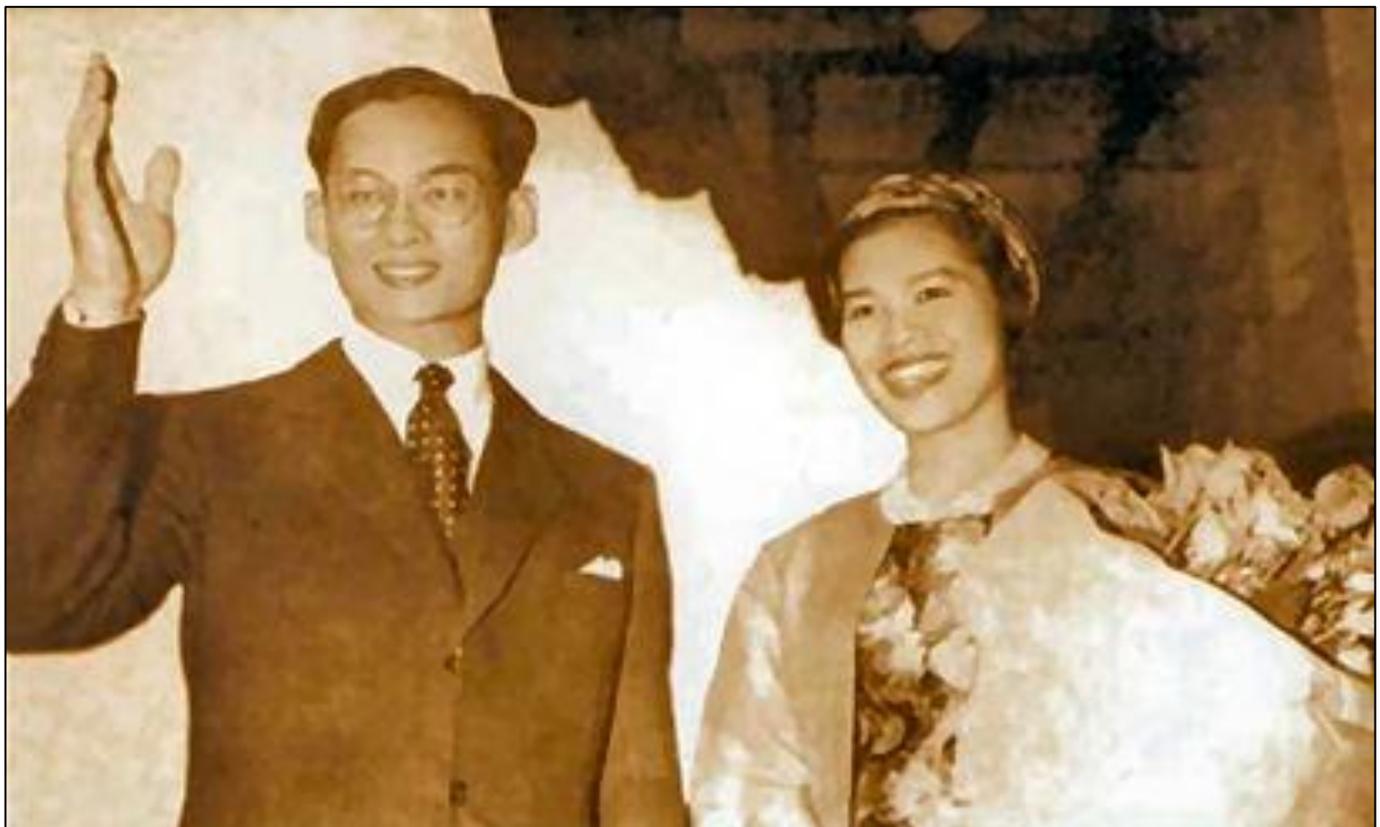


Entrance to the Penang Sports Club. ([Back](#))

Doubtless, the biggest Social (Official) occasion in which I had the honour to be involved during this time in Malaysia resulted from a phone call I had in my office from the O.C, Air Cdre Ford, who summoned me to his office for a discussion on a planned visit of the King and Queen of Thailand to our Base later in the year. "Ted" he said as I stood apprehensively and at Attention,

looking across to his seated position at his large semi-circular desk “I have just received advice from our HQ in Singapore that the Thai Royal Couple will be visiting Malaysia later this year part of which includes a visit to our Base here at Butterworth. We need a Protocol Officer for this so I want you to get into “protocol mode”. “Very good sir” was my hesitant reply. He then went on to say that the main reason they would be using our Base would be as a follow-on to their visit to Penang where they would have arrived on the previous day at the Penang airport. For their departure, they were to utilise a Malaysian Airline Viscount Service which they would join at the RAAF Butterworth Air Base. Their presence at Butterworth would be less than an hour. “So Ted”, he continued. “we have about nine months to plan this visit and for Starters I require you to attend the first Penang State Government visit over at Penang next week”. “Very good Sir” I replied - “I will do my best,” “Roger young man ” he replied so “so off you now go and start Protocolling”!.

ARRIVAL OF THE KING AND QUEEN OF THAILAND. [\(Back\)](#)



Whenever His Majesty the Thailand King's travels on official state visits to North America, Europe and Asia between 1960 and 1967, Her Majesty the Queen was always by the young monarch's side.

The above photograph and text was “bannered” in the Far East media at the time of their Majesty's visit to Malaysia in the 1960's. The visit included visiting RAAF Base Butterworth from whence they would be departing in a Malaysian Airways Viscount for Kuala Lumpur.

I was soon finding that the OC's predictions about Local Government meetings proved to be right on the button as I was summoned to my first meeting a few weeks later. In attendance was the State Police Commissioner (still a "Brit" in those times) the local Sultan of Kedah, the State Secretary (a Malay Senior Public Servant), the local Member for Province Wellesley and the State Governor's Official Secretary. From the RAAF's viewpoint I was the OC's rep and I was accompanied by the RAAF Assistant Provost Marshal, Sqn Ldr Harry Bridle (from memory). The RAAF's responsibility would be confined to onBase Ceremonial activities, including a viceRegal Parade (i.e. most of the Base personnel) and security during the Royal Visitor's presence on the Base planned to be from 1430 to 1600. For the next three months, similar Meetings were held each four weeks, and then, when transferred to the Houses of Parliament in Kuala Lumpur, they were held with a similar frequency. The final briefing in K.L occurred about two weeks prior to the planned date for the Royal Visitors arrival in Malaysia at Penang. There were 90 "Delegates" seated around a huge circular table and the Meeting was chaired by Tengku Abdul Rahman (right), the Prime Minister of Malaysia, whose Right Hand Man for Royal visits was Abdul Latiff the then Minister for Foreign Affairs.



Each Rep was called upon for a short briefing on their particular element of the visit. As a Flight Lieutenant, among the many "heavies" present, included the Service Chiefs of the three Malaysian Services, I felt a little "out of my depth"! That being said, when called upon to say my little piece, I did so from my written brief, although a little nonplussed when introduced as the first Speaker and as Wing Commander Ilton rather than Flight Lieutenant. The Service Chiefs aforementioned gave me an encouraging smile at this "instant" promotion gaff, and clapped generously when I had finished my address. The one thing that made me feel a little more comfortable was the fact that I had been the House Guest of the Foreign Minister the night before the Meeting. The reason given by Abdul Latiff for me being "the first cab off the rank" was that I had travelled the furthest (from Butterworth although some may have thought I had come all the way from Australia?). The next real surprise occurred when I had finished and had answered the few queries that had been raised, the said Foreign Minister then excused me from the rest of the Proceedings and at the same time offered me the use of his Mercedes and Syce (Chauffeur) for the rest of the day, which I duly accepted and did enjoy.

On my return to Butterworth I was then called upon by the OC to brief the various elements of the Base as to what would be occurring on the Big Day at RAAF Base Butterworth. Mainly Parade Ground preparations and associated Drill rehearsals and Saluting dais presentation, (as it turned out, the Penang Protocol Department dressed-up the Dais which became heavily festooned with the Royal couple's favourite colour yellow), plus the importance re timings and Security. The Guest List was not our problem, as this would be arranged by the Penang Government offices, (excepting of course our own Australian Political and VIP list). Aspects of Security would be a matter of liaison between our Provost Services and the local civil police. Also because of Flight Planning for the departure of the Royal Visitors from the Base, timing considerations had to be spot on!. The latter could be a difficulty given that in those days there was no connecting bridge from Penang and Butterworth and that the Royal Motorcade would also have to traverse the seven or so kilometres of the North South highway from the Butterworth Ferry Terminal to the Air Base.

A spectator crowded roadside element would doubtless occur, this coupled with the narrowness of the road could slow the progress of the Royal Motorcade and their arrival at the

Air Base. Accordingly the Penang Police Commissioner would be asked to arrange not only for a police motorbike led convoy but also for Police Motor-Bike outriders to precede the Royal Convoy and keep the road clear. Another problem was one of local afternoon weather conditions. I recall that at that time of year in Northern Malaysia and almost as regular as clockwork, at about 1600, the afternoon "Sumatras" (big winds and heavy rains) would descend upon our airfield. This aspect was also a matter for lengthy discussion at our final meeting (Malay Delegates in K.L). Such a disturbing event had been considered for the recent wedding of one of the current Malaysian King's (the Yang de Pertuan Agong) daughter which resulted in the decision to enlist the aid of a "Bomah" (witchdoctor) to be present at the morning's Nuptials. The "Sumatra" stayed away. A similar arrangement was made for the Butterworth departure. In the event, the "Bomah's" presence did suggest, at the least, a successful five minute delaying of the "Sumatra" given that the Royal Couple emplaned without any meteorological discomfort. Regrettably this could not be said for the assembled guests and the Parade Ground entourage all of whom, were windswept and drenched, as too was the festooned Dais, as the Royal Aircraft taxied away for take-off.

Although now, some forty years later, I do not remember the exact programme timings but I do recall that the duration of the visit to the Butterworth Air Base was to be no longer than 90 minutes and would be confined to happenings at the Parade Ground, i.e. welcomes by the Official Party viz Governor of Penang and his Senior as well as Political Staff, the Air Officer Commanding HQ FEAF Singapore, the Officer Commander of RAAF Butterworth and his senior staff and other guests seated at the V.I.P seating area adjacent to the Saluting Dais.

I had to maintain a close timeframe vigilance for the approaching Royal Convoy as it approached the Base perimeter and which had been carefully calculated from several practice runs, to be a period of four minutes. I was to alert the OC as soon as visual contact had been made to facilitate his escorting the senior V.I.P representatives to the "red carpet" leading from the Royal Couple's limousine to the Dais area. We did not have the benefit of Mobile Phones, or in those days, "walkie-talkies, however, the visual contact required, by me, could be readily obtained from the Aircraft Control Tower with appropriate white-gloved hand-signals from a Service Policeman stationed on the Tower balcony. As the Royal Motorcade was to be immediately preceded by Civil Police Motor Cyclists this would prompt the necessary handsignal from the Tower to me as soon as the leading Police Motor Cyclist was sighted!. This occurred as planned, I moved to the OC's seat, smartly saluted and proclaimed " Sir, the Royal Motorcade is approaching the entrance to the Base and will be here in four minutes would you care to accompany the welcoming party to the Royal Party's alighting area". "Thank you Ilton", was the OC's retort as he and his small group proceeded to the assigned area. I was feeling rather pleased until I looked back towards the Tower and noting an obvious urgency of gloved hand-signalled "cancellations" I moved to the OC's party and asked them to perhaps return to their seats as the Royal Party's motorcade had not yet been sighted!! I returned my anxious gaze to the Control Tower the Service Policeman was still in position but not as yet another hand signal. This eventually came nine minutes since the original!. What had happened, and although crowd control on the highway had been high on the importance list, it did prove to be worse than ever expected, thus necessitating one of the Police Motor Cyclists to move off five or so minutes before the Royal Motorcade. His, in fact, was the mistaken hand signalled advice of the earlier "here they come".

Although it was only three or four minutes later when the signal was again given, it did seem like an eternity to me. When giving the OC my second attempt of announcing the Royal's

imminent arrival my voice must have sounded like that of a Eunuch at the entrance to a Sultan's tent!. Other than this unfortunate element of timings the rest of the visit went very well. The parade ground work was a credit to the Royal Australian Air Force, the Salute taking by the King during the march past was quite inspiring, the martial music of the RAAF Band was fantastic as always, and in all a most successful occasion the first visit of a Foreign Royal Visit to Malaysia. I must confess tho' perhaps that is not what the O.C might be thinking as he walked past me accompanying the Royal couple to their aircraft, he turned and said in what I thought was perhaps a salutary comment, " Ilton, see me in my Quarters as soon as you are finished here". I replied "yes sir" at the same time buckling a little at the knees and wondering whether that any communication system that relies on hand signals has any place with Ceremonial occasions such as Royal visits.



The Officer Commanding RAAF Base Butterworth, Air Commodore Ford, welcomes the Governor of Penang and wife also the Air Marshal (RAF) Commander in Chief FEAF. ([Back](#))

As the Royal aircraft headed off into the, by now, diminishing "Sumatra", on its way to K.L. I realised that I had not particularly noticed until then, that I was absolutely drenched from the "Sumatra's affront". Even the peak of my cap had twisted into several mishapen bends. What was worse, I had not a change of clothes handy, part of living on Penang Island, so I was unable to report to the OC as summoned in other than the dishevelled attire in which I rather forlornly stood. But off I went, as I approached the OC's residence it occurred to me that others might also have been so summoned, there were cars everywhere. I rang the doorbell when a rather smartly dressed Indian steward enquired as to my name and my purpose. I at the same time looked down into the sunken lounge area of the OC's house which looked out, over the heads of many of the earlier official party, on to the rather lovely distant Penang Hill area abutting the Penang Harbourside landscape. I then replied to the Steward's question that "I am Flight Lieutenant Ilton reporting to the OC as earlier instructed". I then noted the OC in a nearby group of visitors and was, as you can imagine, highly delighted when he said "come on down Ted and have a drink with us, you deserve it you've done a great job as my Protocol Officer over the past twelve months and particularly today"! This welcome was really something and I still treasure it to this day. Other aspects of the visit also remain strongly in my fond memories of those days of what turned out to be the first of two such tours, more of which later.

I did not mention earlier, that both Mattee and I were official Guests at a Cocktail party for the King and Queen at Government House on the previous evening.



The King and Queen of Thailand being escorted to the Saluting Dais
by Air Cdre and Mrs Ford. ([Back](#))



The guard Commander, Flt Lt D Smithies accompanies the King for the inspection of the Guard [\(Back\)](#)

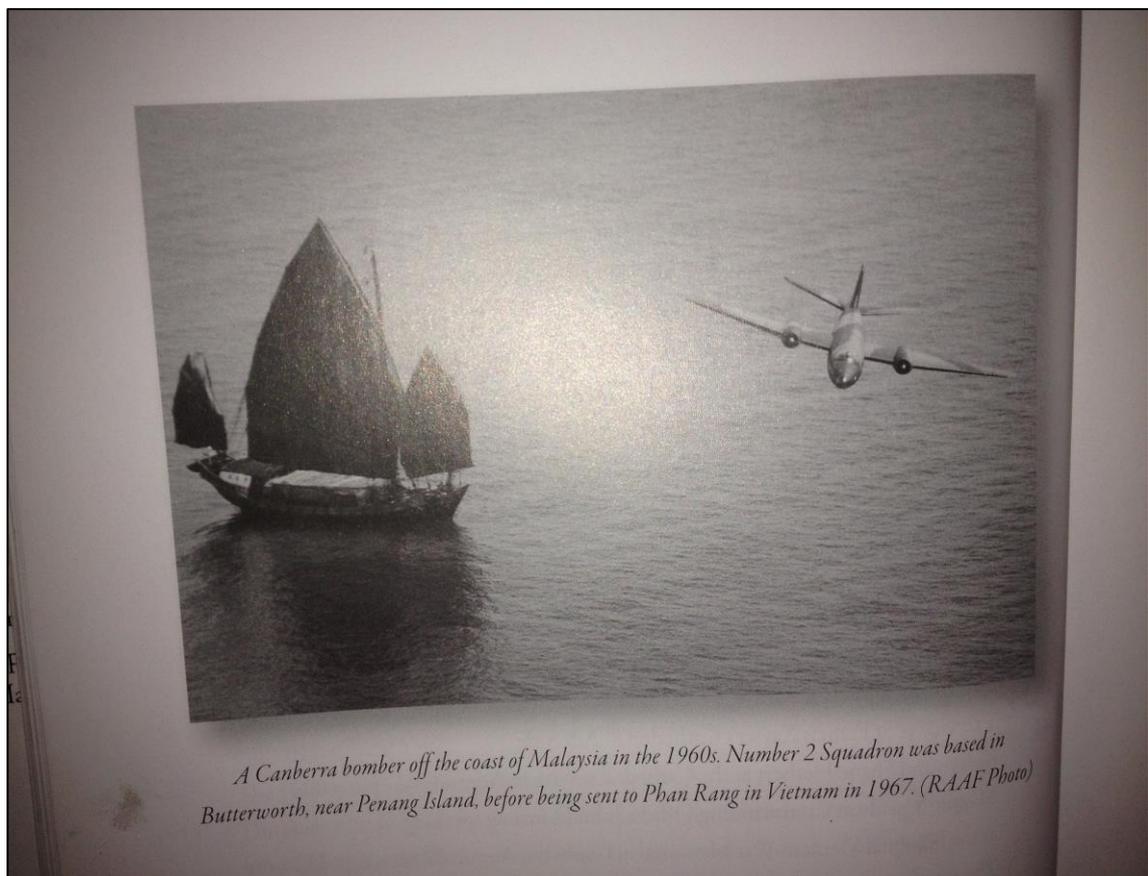
BECOMING “OLD HANDS” IN MALAYSIA [\(Back\)](#)

Despite my preoccupation with the Royal Tour planning and associated activities therewith, my family and I were becoming quite accustomed to the “Conditions of Service” demands and protocols that were an essential part of living in the “early post White Raj” era of the “new” Malaysia. As it was in the early 1960’s anyway. Even to the unaccustomed nature in the domestic area of having servants in fact three in our case, a Cook, an Amah and a Gardener. And not forgetting the daily “door to door” privileges of being picked up each morning in an albeit battered Mercedes taxi and returned the same way each afternoon to be met by the Cook taking with one hand your hat and at the same time proffering with the other on a silver tray designed for the purpose a cold pewter tankard of “Anchor” beer!! At the same time wives/mothers were almost living with an off hands daily life no washing/ironing, no cooking. builtin childcare etc. These activities became part and parcel in the daily lives of the RAAF expatriates as had indeed been in the lives of all white faced people of the earlier Colonial era which had obtained for a century or more under the British (Empire) Colonial system. Fortunately our being “well married” with two young children and being accustomed to the traditional parent and household relationships and domestic responsibilities accompanying them, we were able to balance our daily domestic balance with our other commitments thus ensuring an acceptable and indeed enjoyable daily lifestyle

On the other hand it was obvious that a similar level of family maturity among those younger officers whose coincidental hastened marriage plans occurred back in Australia when a posting to Malaysia was announced. In other words it was too good an opportunity to be missed for a honeymoon cruise on a delightful Ocean Liner, followed by “built-in” Nursemaid/Nannies during the two or sometimes three years before returning to the realities of again living the normal Australian life bereft of Servants and builtin baby sitters accompanied by the all found

“Housing” as had been the automatic case with their “lot” during the tenure of the Malaysian posting. It was rather sad that in many cases the young bride could have at least one and sometimes two babies during the tour with their husbands at RAAF Butterworth. Often too, the elder child could reach the age of two without much, if any, knowledge of babyhood English exchanges, but could be quite more “lucid” in the tongue of their Chinese, Indian or Malaysian Amah!! But less of these philosophising premises and back to more on the daily work activities of the RAAF members of the family

Each working day on the Base was full of excitement firstly from the daily (cool) early morning trip across to the mainland on the RAAF hired ferry, weaving our way in and out of the many anchored cargo ships from all parts of the World either loading or unloading their “goodies” into or out of barges and sampans. Then, the raison de’tre, the operational flying activities of the Sabre fighters of No’s 3 and 77 Squadrons as well as the No 2 Sqn Canberra bombers



As a RAAF No 2 Sqn Canberra takes a close look at a visiting Junk

There was also the likelihood of the comings and goings of “B” flight’s rotary winged “Hueys” attached to No 2 Sqn whose main tasks were the light resupply or reman of Troops in the jungles of North Malaysia or adjacent Thailand Borders where Terrorists activities at that time were still abounding. The constant comings and goings of the Dakotas of “C” Flight was also part of the daily flying programme with Air Lift commitments either of supplies or personnel. Among the latter was a relatively constant “Ambassadorial/Consular mix “ payload.”. Regular visits of RAAF C130’s at least weekly (each Friday) visited from Richmond. Coupled with this

were the also quite frequent visits of RAAF Neptune aircraft based at Townsville, No 10 Squadron. Added to the normal RAAF tasks were the oft visitors of Royal Naval carrier based Fighters, as well as the earlier mentioned V Bombers and their support aircraft. This of course required RAF elements on the ground as well as other periodical supporting aircraft from the U.K. Bristol Freighters,

Beverlys and other Airlift type aircraft were often seen operating in and out of the Base at Butterworth, as well as Valetta aircraft which were a constant part of the daily flying scene. These provided a daily service to and from the RAF Base at Changi in Singapore. Our task on the Base, i.e. that of Base Squadron of which I was Adjutant, was to provide all the various Base support elements to each of the Butterworth Squadrons. Additional Support also included schooling for the Australian children that had accompanied their parents to Malaysia. This school was committed to Primary school levels although some provision was also made for secondary school students to have their Correspondence lessons monitored by the School staff. Some Kindergarten facilities, although limited, were available on Penang Island but fees were not subsidised by the Australian Government. Teachers for the School were provided by the Victorian and New South Wales Education Departments.

Base Security was another factor of Base Squadron services, in this regard in addition to RAAF Provost Services Aerodrome Defence services were provided by a quarterly rotation of Australian and UK Army Companies. Another and unique Base Support activity, i.e unique to normal RAAF Base Support, was the need for managing those two earlier mentioned Conditions of Service in Malaysia, both on and Off Base Housing and Domestic Servants. In addition the Base was “home” to a large number of Locally Engaged Civilians for on Base employment. Yet another major Support service as part of the Base was No 4 RAAF Hospital which was within the Base Real Estate boundaries and provided as a norm basic hospital services including Maternity. At the time of writing (the early 60’s) the Speciality Medical Officer Categories were provided at No 4 RAAF by the Royal Air Force. The RAAF Medical Branch officers were established at the Hospital for both the normal G.P commitments and Referrals to the appropriate RAF Medical Specialist. At my time of these writings (early 1960’s) cornerstones of a British Military presence, similar to those extending from Gibraltar to Africa and eastwards to India and Burma were located at Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong.

The latter areas offered “one of the best kept Secrets” for cheap tourist travel for Aussies in Malaysia and which was listed under the label of “Indulgence Travel”! This was wholly and solely occasioned by British Garrison manning changeover needs throughout the Far East and which involved two yearly rotations of “fresh troops from Home”. Thousands of troops and, if also involved, members of their respective families were involved in each changeover. The means of transportation for these changeovers was the Ocean Liner (these days known as “Cruise Ships”) “Oxfordshire” and “Nevassa”. These two ships would drop off the regarrisoning Troops and families at the appropriate Ports on the way out and pickup those being repatriated on the way back. The final change over Port being Hong Kong so it would not be hard to imagine that by the time these ships arrived in Penang on their outward journey, the ships would be all but bereft of passengers. Accordingly, the resultant “spare” passenger space was then on offer to other Garrison style troops (and families) of kindred Services in the Penang area for Ten Pounds (\$20 today’s money) per head for a return sea voyage to Hong Kong. One can also readily imagine how popular this bit of “Indulgence” would become in “RAAF Land particularly among NCO troops and their families who were entitled to “reverse rank” top picking order.

As far as the RAAF personnel were concerned I was the Officer in Charge of “Indulgence” approvals and it was often the case that all available spare space was being taken by the non-commissioned and their families, so Officers and their families were just as often victims of a “luck of the draw” situation. Also another proviso was that to ensure some certainty about the return from Hong Kong, applicants had to provide prepaid evidence of air travel back to Penang from Hong Kong. This was a relatively costly bit of Insurance and quite often meant that the opportunity could become quite expensive to the applicant particularly those with large families. The alternative “indulgence” to Hong Kong and still at a basic affordability was a ten pound return “Air Fare” via RAF Hastings aircraft (with a usual departure of Changi in Singapore and not Butterworth) and the same Insurance of a return civil air fare from Hong Kong had to apply. Would you believe, we tried this and the four of us certainly got to Hong Kong for ten quid and for a week in that city. But whilst there all RAF Hastings had been grounded for technical problems and would probably apply for two or more weeks. Our return by Cathay Airways cost me 400 pound.



MV Neveva. ([Back](#))

Earlier on I mentioned some of the “traps” associated with a posting to Malaysia, and in particular the “domestic scene” where, in so many areas, the lifestyle difference for RAAF personnel took some time to become locally accustomed. One of these areas involved the necessity to adopt the Colonial custom of the “Chit” system, i.e signing a “Chit” to acknowledge the amount owing, and even more important the redeeming of them with monthly cash payments. This didn't apply at the various Markets, tailors and dressmakers, however it did apply in those Clubs which had lots of RAAF personnel patronage. In particular, the Sports Club, The Penang Club and the Swimming Club where almost daily patronage was the norm!. So easy when, in a group, to throw caution to the wind without a real concern for the payment that would be required at the end of the month The mention of these Clubs does prompt a recall of just how popular they were with the many RAAF families that lived on Penang Island. Patronage of the Swimming Club would be almost a daily occurrence and the ambient temperature coupled with the humidity did in fact make for repetitive slaking of one's thirst would be reflected in the monthly bill as a quite significant figure. As you will note, from the picture below, what a delightful place the Swimming Club was for all its users. It would not be overstating it that it was virtually a second home to most of the RAAF contingent that were

living on Penang Island as well as the many living on the mainland adjacent to the RAAF Base particularly at weekends.



The Penang Swimming Pool, from the dining room balcony.

At the time of these happenings (early 1960's) the Constitution of the Penang Swimming Club excluded non-Europeans from Membership however, they were well catered for by the nearby Chinese Swimming Club. Another aspect of the Penang Swimming Club was its inclusion of a small yacht Club and the delightful coconut palm fringed beach which was well used by the younger members of the Club and particularly on Sundays when most servants had their "statutory" day off thus prompting a need for dining out on Sundays. The Club had an excellent dining room.

We adopted another common dining practice on Sundays, spending the morning at the swimming club and then driving around the Coast from the Club to a popular beached eatery in the grounds of the "Lone Pine" Hotel. The Lone Pine served a rather magnificent curry "tiff" under the huge pine trees which lined the beach in front of the hotel – the beach also provided an opportunity for a leisurely swim.

If Sundays were the chosen time for beachside pursuits, then Saturdays were shopping days, more for buying the many popular Goods in this "tax free" part of the World. Such purchases being in the shape of Consumer goods, cameras, tape recorders, radios, record players, watches etc. These would be "hunted" with gay abandon!! Also, as clothing was so cheap, both for ladies fashions and men's suits, shirts etc. the well known traders prospered.



The Beach front at the Lone Pine Hotel ([Back](#))

Another enjoyable pursuit, particularly for the officers and their families was Saturday morning shopping pursuits in Penang, punctuated by a “dropin” at the Cold Storage milk bar and Delicatessen. Further over in Georgetown where the very typical English department store, Whiteaways, could be found, where as well as shopping in a Western style environment one could also have English cups of tea, scones and buns and where one could almost feel that one was in a morning tea place on the British Isles. Following these events, a “must” for Saturday mornings, again for “we officers”, was the not to be missed visit to the really grand “watering hole” of the “Runnymede Hotel set in beautiful waterfront grounds, similar to the E and O hotel and the Penang Club.

It is important tho’ that I mention that this facility was not always one of pleasure! The Japanese during W.W.II had made the Runnymede into an important HQ for Japanese hierarchy officials which also included the beheading local residents and prisoners of war under the huge tree at the front of the Runnymede buildings dwelling upon which proved to be unproductive for morale!.

As I write this and looking back on the wonderful and varied lifestyle we had in Malaysia life was truly very full both at work on the Base and during our leisure time. What with the Swimming Club, the Sports Club and the Penang Club coupled with Dinner parties here and

there, and not forgetting the rather marvellous Social programme at the Officers' Mess. All of this of course aided and abetted by having built in "babysitters" in the shape of the family Servants.



Our Domestic Help 1960 1963 ([Back](#))

LR: Satonah (Cook), Raphia (Ahmah), Subramaniam (Satonah's son).

Another great facility was provided by the Royal Air Force with their two engine Valetta aircraft which ran a daily Transport service from Butterworth to Changhi. It was called the "ButtP" (the "P" being for passengers). One registered one's name with the RAAF Movement Control Officer who would then liaise direct with the RAF Transport office. There was a sort of "Pecking Order" and you would be advised on seat availability dates and times etc. In most cases it was a family affair and made possible two days in Singapore for sightseeing and shopping. An alternative plan for a visit to Singapore was created in the form of the swapping/exchanging of Married Quarters with RAAF personnel who are on the posted strength of the RAF's Far East Headquarters at Changi.

The usual length of such a swap was seven days and in most cases the swapping parties would drive their own vehicles to/from Singapore/Penang. We availed ourselves of such an opportunity and exchanged with Wg Cdr Norm Nixon and his family. It was a wonderful experience, we drove our Dodge down and crossed paths with Norm and his family on their way North at a "Rest House" at Slim River, a few miles south of K.L. Norm's MQ was right

outside the RAF Officers' Mess, which we used every day, particularly their swimming pool.. Rather tragically tho', just a few weeks later, Norm had been out at a male Social function and on the way home one of his front tyres blew out, his car hit a tree then rolled over and he was killed instantly.

Another attractive pursuit for the Bass Squadron administrative staff was getting on to the "Staff Visit" roster. This entailed "swanning it" up to Hong Kong on one of the International Airlines out of Singapore. The mission being to check the wellbeing of the small staff of a "Restricted" Communications Unit at Little Sai Won in the Hills district of Hong Kong. I was fortunate enough to do this on two occasions. The first one was, as mentioned earlier, with my family, the subsequent one involved supervision of Airmen Promotion Examinations.

The "toughest" part of the latter was the travelling first class bit in a BOAC "Britannia" on the Singapore Hong Kong Singapore legs. The "cream being on top" as our party of four were the only passengers in this rather beautiful aircraft the reason being the "Jumbo 747's" had just entered the civil air routes of the world and no paying passenger wanted to travel in an "oldfashioned" propeller driven airliner!.



B.O.A.C. Bristol Britannia. ([Back](#))

These aircraft were on lease to Malaysian Airlines in the early 1950's

As it turned out we had a wonderful trip up to Hong Kong, firstly to Singapore. We awaited what had been become known as "The Whispering Giant" which was operated by Malaysian Airlines. It was quite strange when the "all aboard"" was tannoyed in the terminal and only four people responded which, of course, was we four little RAAF people looking quite humbled at the prospect of being waited on hand and foot all the way to Hong Kong. From memory it was about a nine hour flight, and it seemed as if we were eating and drinking for the entire flight. This was not quite so as there is after all a limit as to what one was able to drink or/and eat. We did make the most of it though as our return journey back to Butterworth was in an RAF Hastings Transport aircraft cold tea and not very interesting sandwiches.

One of the activities which we had hoped to get involved in whilst in Malaysia was the game of golf. However, there seemed little opportunities. The only local Golf course on Penang Island was for Member's only and even though a couple of the Rubber Estates had small (9 hole) Courses these were available on an Invitation only basis. So we gave up the idea until towards

the latter end of our Tour I thought of a possibility of perhaps having an embryo golf course on the Base, where there was plenty of room for at least a golf practice area. I approached my CO Group Captain Dowling and suggested we could utilise the area behind the Transport Hangar which had to be regularly mowed any way. The plan was, as a minimum, to create at least a three hole layout i.e. a Par 3, Par 4 and Par 5 each of which would have a suitable Green facilitating Putting practice. Later on in these writings I will be taking Readers back to Butterworth in 1972 to which I had returned for a second tour and the high delights of finding the embryo Golf Course had, during the subsequent 10 years, developed into a full 18 hole golf course, 9 holes actually but with 18 tees to provide the feel of an 18 holes of Golf each time one played. Moreover, there was a large Golf storage building and an excellent Club House (and locker room) where holes played could be “replayed” over a glass or two of Anchor Beer or a fresh lime drink. Snacks were also available. These were excellent examples of initiative and creativity among each replacement force every two years.

We were enjoying the Far East experience so much that we suddenly found that we were in our third year and plans were being put in place for our “repatriation” back to Australia as well as the travel arrangements involved. We were more than thankful that the normal means of travel was still by Ocean Liner, and even further of this state of mind when we learned that we would be travelling home in the S.S Oronsay, departing Penang two weeks before Easter 1963. This led to the need for preparing our car for the sea voyage back to Australia which meant more than just disconnection of the battery and emptying of the petrol tank, but more of rectifying the wear and tear of the tropical environment i.e. paint work and even the upholstery and carpets.

As a large majority of RAAF members purchased near new American cars to take home, the vehicle refurbishment business soon blossomed in Penang. In most cases it was a repaint, a reupholster and recarpet. The encouraging aspect to have all of these things done was the ridiculously cheap price. I soon booked in to the most popular refit garage where all three refurbishments were ordered, a repaint which entailed a complete strip back to the bare metal and then about five or six finish coats of a colour of choice. The upholstery and carpets were matched to the original as too was the paint job unless different colours were chosen. I chose black body with white roof as per the original. The whole exercise took about seven days. What I was not expecting as far as the shipping of my car was concerned, was it being involved in an “accident” (?) whilst on board ship. There were past incidents when some body damage was incurred with careless handling by deckhands with the lowering of the vehicle into the Hold! We actually watched this manoeuvre, with somewhat abated breath and were pleased to note its gentle passage from the crane during its deck lowering process, hoping that the same careful handling would occur when being unloaded at Port Melbourne.

Regrettably this was to occur much sooner. We called in at Fremantle en route to Melbourne where during our short stay the “wharfies” went out on strike. This occasioned the Ship’s deck crew to do the “securing” of Hold hatches when readying again for the remainder of our voyage. These hatches were square and monstrous wooden affairs, that if not squared up before lowering could fall down the Hold. This, would you believe, happened on the very hatch at the bottom of which was my carefully restored and in mint condition, Dodge. One corner of the hatch cover caught the front mudguard of my car and continued its scraping right along to the rear mudguard creating a wide tear in the metal of the body of both doors, You can imagine the anguish I felt then and for the rest of the voyage? As it turned out the RACV met me at the ship in Port Melbourne and was quick to advise me that the Insurance company had organised a

repairer and that the car would be drivable. In the event the repairers quickly had it looking like brand new again.

It was during my time in Malaysia that some RAAF manning problems became an issue and its effect on Officer postings and promotions, particularly in the Special Duties Branch of which I was a member, The latter came about because of Federal Government Budgeting and relevant reductions in funds for the Defence Forces at the time. In the forefront of these cuts was the RAAF and a reduction in flying hours forecast for the ensuing three years. The spinoff from the latter meant a reduction in air crew training and a surplus of pilots during the period involved. This surplus was taken up by the RAAF's Special Duties Branch into which General Duties Officer pilots were posted. Another effect of this policy was the reduction in Special Duties officer promotions, particularly promotions to Squadron Leader rank. The Army and the Navy on the other hand with similar to the RAAF equivalent rank i.e Major and Lieutenant Commander were granted promotion automatically after five years in the lower rank. The RAAF policy for promotion to Squadron Leader was merit based and not on time served in the lower rank. The stringency of the Federal Government's Defence spending in the early to mid 1960's did slowdown RAAF officer promotions to Squadron Leader. My expectations for promotion to Squadron Leader, might have, in normal circumstances, occurred while in Malaysia. Alas, this was not to be for some years after, when back in Australia.

OUR RETURN TO AUSTRALIA. [\(Back\)](#)

The time had come for our return posting to a RAAF Base somewhere in Australia. In this regard and to facilitate the Posting authorities selection of postings, there was a process called Posting Preferences and one could make known the three preferences which would suit them. In practice, more often than not, a stated preference would not be available. In our case, as we had our own home in Melbourne my Posting preferences were Melbourne, Laverton or Pt Cook. So we were more than happy when my Posting to the RAAF Academy at Point Cook was announced where I was to be the Adjutant. There were many advantages in such a posting back in our own house, and back in Victoria which my wife Mattee and I really loved. As to the timing we were sailing out of Penang on "Oronsay" on the last week in March 1963 and due in Port Melbourne on Good Friday. In making comparisons between the "M V Roma" and the "S.S Oronsay" is probably a little unfair size wise and fit out particularly were features which put the P&O vessel streets ahead of the Flotta Louro Line's vessel. We did have a wonderful time on the Italian ship being our first ever cruise, however, there is little doubt that P & O ships were quite special with expectations at the time of the grandeur of the many P & O vessels which literally were crowding the oceans of the world.

The Class system was still very much in vogue with four Classes on board "Oronsay" and if I remember rightly they were First, Second, Third "and Steerage. We had the good fortune to be "First Class" and enjoyed every minute of the two week voyage, Even the problems with my car took second pace when ticking off the ships attractions and many facilities, most remembered being the First Class dining room.



Oronsay berthing in Sydney (1963) ([Back](#))

RMS (later SS) Oronsay was the second Orient Line ship built after World War II, her earlier sister RMS Orcades was built in 1948. She was named after an island off the West coast of Scotland, which also influenced her décor. To enhance her Scottish identity, she had a “Targe and Broadsword” insignia located aft of her funnel and on her bow. She had the typical Orient livery of a Corn coloured hull, white superstructure and a black topped yellow. Built by Vickers Armstrong Ltd at Barrowin Furness, especially for the Australasian service, her accommodations set a new standard, both in first and tourist class accommodation. With the final cost of building coming in at £4,228,000, she was considered to be the epitome of postwar British shipbuilding. Her decor was by Brian O'Rourke who was also the interior designer for what was called the “new look” of the Orion, as well as the Orcades, however, her exterior differed from the earlier Orcades (and the newer SS Orsova and the last Orient Line ship ever built, the SS Oriana) having been fitted with a thick mast set atop her Bridge. Like other passenger liners, Oronsay had considerable cargo facilities, with space for 370,000 cubic feet, accommodating both dry and refrigerated cargoes.

POINT COOK. ([Back](#))

At that time (1963), the RAAF Academy was still based at Point Cook, Victoria, which was a bare expanse of flat land beside Port Phillip Bay, being cold and windy in winter. The Academy's activities were later (1982) undertaken at the new Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra comprising the other two Defence Colleges of Duntroon (Army) and Jervis Bay (Navy). Point Cook was very much a mix of the old and the new, having been the birthplace of the RAAF in 1921. Other units on the base in the 1960s were the Basic Flying Training School (BFTS), the School of Languages, the Institute of Aviation Medicine and the embryo R.A.A.F Museum containing some old aircraft, WWI flying suits and the like. The RAAF Academy had been created a few years previously from the RAAF College, (formed in 1948) by the addition of formal University studies for a BSc under the auspices of the University of Melbourne or for a BEng at the University of Sydney.



RAAF Base Point Cook Crest. ([Back](#))



RAAF Academy, Point Cook 1963 [\(Back\)](#)

The Symbol – the Australian Swift.

The Motto – True!

THE AIM: *To provide instruction, experience and incentive to each cadet so that he/she will graduate with the knowledge and qualities of leadership required of a junior officer in the Royal Australian Air Force and with a basis for continued development throughout a lifetime of service to this/her country leading to readiness for responsibilities as a future Air Commander. To this end the curriculum will be designed to impart a thorough knowledge of the elements upon which air power is based and to develop character, physical and mental fitness and an understanding of men.*

I must confess that I was quite “chuffed” in being selected for the Adjutant appointment at the RAAF Academy, it having developed from the genesis of RAAF College in 1948 to Academy status in 1961. Moreover, there was an accompanying prestigious aura and intention. In fact. its primary role was the provision of “an elite Officer Corps” from which future senior leaders, including the then post of Chief of the Air Staff, (later to be called Chief of Air Force.) could be selected.

My first few weeks at the Academy were punctuated with the two main aims of the time, one as important as the other. i.e having a satisfactory move back into our house at East Ormond and learning as quickly as possible my new job although the same in many respects as my Adjutant job at RAAF Butterworth, the locality and aim of the Academy did provide some essential differences.

To house situation first. You will recall earlier that we had arranged to lease our house before our move to Canberra. The tenants had all sorts of good references concerning Tenant suitability. When we returned to the house after an almost four year absence it was obvious that our Agents had not made many, if any, inspections. Internally it was a real mess, even, would you believe, the carpet in front of the fire hearth in the lounge room was badly oil stained, neighbours threw some light on the subject when advising us that one of the boys in the family use to work on his motorbike in front of the lounge room fireplace. The rest of the house had similar marks of neglect. The tenants had left some weeks before we arrived back home. Mattee was a very good “house worker” and soon had things back to the way we had left them. Fortunately the carpet in front of the fireplace responded well to some vigorous cleaning and the placing of an appropriate carpet mat in the offending spot!. Schooling was also an activity that had some priority. Gary was enrolled in the Murrumbena State School and Robyn enjoyed the early childhood pleasures of the local kindergarten.

Point Cook became an immediate area of my work involvement and in many ways took me back to Laverton, only five miles away, where the Air Force (in the 30’s) and its planes were a daily activity for me to witness as a young five year old!. It is rather amazing that 60 years on (1980’s) and supported by a 34 year involvement as a member of the RAAF, I became preoccupied in fighting for RAAF Point Cook’s survival. Almost sacrilegious considering its hallmark as the birthplace of the RAAF in 1921. The Federal Government had decided to dispose of the property to Commercial interests. Although I may never know whether my efforts had any impact on the eventual decision by the Government NOT TO SELL it is quite safe to say that many of us were overjoyed with the decision!.

As well as the Units already mentioned on the Registrar of Point Cook, the RAAF Academy,(formerly RAAF College) seemed something special to me and to others given its role of providing Graduates destined for senior leadership in the Royal Australian Air Force. Its importance could also be measured by the quality of its senior Staff members beginning with the “two hatted” appointment of OC RAAF Base Point Cook, Commandant of the RAAF Academy, namely a highly decorated WWII Bomber pilot, Air Commodore K.R Parsons, CBE., DSO., DFC, AFC. His Deputy Base Commander and Deputy at the Academy was Group Captain M G Cowan.

Air Cdr Parson's review of the 5 years he spent as Commandant of the Academy. 1965

It has been my honour and privilege to hold the responsible appointment of Commandant of the RAAF Academy for the past five years, and I leave Point Cook with considerable regret. This period has been instructive to me and has given me a great deal of personal pleasure and satisfaction. It is most gratifying to see young men take up the challenge of service life and emerge after five years of concentrated training as capable, efficient officers, academically and professionally qualified. Graduation day is a tremendous event in the life of each cadet, and these occasions have been no less for me as Commandant. I have especial pride for the Cadet Squadron on all these parades and feel that the standard achieved has been at least equal to any military establishment or organisation in the world. Many people who have had considerable overseas experience have expressed similar views to me. During the past years the need for a higher basic education for Air Force officers in the sciences has been accepted by the Service, and it is now well known that the complexity of modern aircraft, guided missiles, weapon systems, their operational control and usage, present problems which make it necessary for future officers to be educated to the point at which they can work with ease in a complicated scientific atmosphere. The course, as now constituted, provides the opportunity for cadets, who are prepared to work hard, to gain knowledge which will be of great value to them during their service careers and enables them to obtain a qualification which will stand them in good stead throughout their lives



I fully appreciate that the course requires a great deal of hard and concentrated work, bearing in mind the service and humanities studies which have to be covered as well as the science degree requirement. I am certain, however, that all who have devoted their full attention to the task and worked with a will, will be justly rewarded and entitled to a tremendous personal sense of achievement. I regret that the building program, when I first arrived, has not yet commenced. However, complete approval has now been given and the final plans of the functional buildings are almost completed. We anticipate tenders to be called early next year and when this contract is met, it will only leave the fight for the cadets' mess to be actioned. I would like to record my sincere appreciation for the work done by the Warden, Mr. Hardy, the academic staff, and the members of the service staff who, although they are only here for shorter periods, give such ready and able cooperation. On many occasions it has been necessary to make extremely heavy demands on all members of the Academy, and these demands have all been met with a very willing response. To the graduates of today, I wish you the very best in your future career take up the mantle of service you are able and ready. I am certain the RAAF will be proud of the service given by our graduates and by those who undertake the course in the future, and I wish each and every one of you who are under training, a successful completion of your course and an enjoyable and interesting future in the service of Her Majesty the Queen and Australia.

My daily activities did not include a lot in respect of Cadet involvement, it was primarily one of Administration. I ran the Orderly Room or “Central Office” would be a more recognisable term. In addition, I was appointed to the Officers’ Mess Committee and had role of Bulk Bar Officer which entailed the keeping of adequate stocks of liquor of all varieties for the weekly resupply to the Officers’ Mess Bar (the RAAF Staff College which had recently left Point Cook for Fairbairn in the ACT and had left behind on the shelves of the Bulk Bar a variety of more liqueurs than I knew existed and added to my knowledge of this type of liquid refreshment).

This secondary Duty did take up a lot of my time to the detriment of my primary role at the Academy HQ. One of few perks in which I was pleased to take part was the “chaperoning” of Air Cadet groups on their programmed visits to other Defence establishments including our own RAAF operational Bases. The most distant of these was to Darwin en route to which we spent time at the RAAF Bases at Richmond, Amberley and Townsville. The then Flt Lt (later Group Captain) Dennis Stubbs a Flt Cdr at the Academy and I mentored the 14 members of No 15 Course, at least two of whom advanced in their career to Air rank namely AVM Brendan O’Loughlin and Air Cdre Dave Bowden. Our means of transport was the more than famous “Gooney Bird” the DC3 and our return journey was straight down the Centre Daly Waters, Alice Springs. Parafield thence Point Cook. Other “extramuros” activities that were not unpleasant to be a part of was joining in attendance at the many sporting events in which the Air Cadets were involved included overnight camps, visits to brother Colleges, the RAN College at Jervis Bay and the Army College at Duntroon. Civic visits of many kinds, the most important at the time was the “Snowy Mountains” hydro electricity project.

While I was enjoying myself with all that Point Cook was offering, including what was termed at the time as “living in” and “loving out”. Being some distance from Melbourne at the time with no Freeways as subsequently occurring, and two car families being virtually non existent, married personnel lived in three nights per week i.e Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays and went home in a “carpool” arrangement with no cost for our Air Force accommodation and meals. This offered two things with a “carpool” arrangement and the wife having the car for at least three weeks at a time, with carpools of four people all of whom owned one car! The other attractive and undoubtedly selfish aspect of these arrangements “living in” was the enjoyment of the Officers’ Mess facilities. This situation remained in this manner until the late 60’s early 70’s when Treasury Rules were changed and “Living In” prompted appropriate, although still reasonable charges whether married or single.

In his farewell address, Air Cdre Parsons addressed some of the new building projects associated with the RAAF Academy’s link with the Melbourne University and the relatively new policy of RAAF Academy Cadets graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree. As a convenience local measure plans were put in place for suitable Lecture room and Science laboratories being constructed to Melbourne University standards within the Academy complex at the Point Cook RAAF Base. Whilst my duties did not include any administrative aspects in the building programme I was heavily involved with the planning for the official opening of the main Project, that being the Science Block as it had by this, become identified. As well as the various Science Labs, within this building was also a main Lecture theatre. It was quite a large edifice with theatre style tiered seating, a stage and lectern for the Lecturer/Guest Speaker, but absolutely no natural lighting. As this was to be the venue for the opening Ceremony of the Building there would be hundreds of official guests as well as families of the Cadets in residence, all ‘crammed’ within its walls. The Building Plan for the Science Block, as specified by Melbourne University, required a multipurpose building built to tertiary academic standards

i.e a tiered Lecture Theatre and a series of Science laboratories all under the same roof. As all this was under construction and completed during my time as Adjutant, it was my responsibility to issue the mandatory Invitation List to attend the Official opening of the Building. Included in the list, headed by the Minister of Defence, would be the Chancellor of the Melbourne University, Federal and State politicians, local Councillors, University Staff, local V.I.P's, senior RAAF officers and parents of Academy Cadets. As far as I can recall the list entailed about 500 people.



Science block, Point Cook Academy.

On the day before the Official Opening there had been some rather dramatic thunderstorms in the neighbouring Werribee/Laverton area, with a likelihood of similar conditions prevailing on the Official Opening day. Ordinarily this would not be a problem where internal gatherings were concerned, however, the Lecture theatre in which all the guests were to be seated for this Ceremony had no natural lighting. It was completely dependent on artificial illumination. The Assistant Commandant of the Academy, Group Captain Cowan, called me into his office due to his concern of another thunderstorm tomorrow and perhaps this time around including Point Cook with the possibility of a Power Blackout. He said "Ted, have you thought about this"?. I quickly replied, "Yes sir, I have arranged with the Barracks officer to have a K.V.A. Generator, hooked into the power grid of the Science building". "Good show Ted" I think the Group Captain said with some obvious relief. He then quickly added "Ted, how are we going to alert the Electrician to press the button of the KVA if it is needed"? (there were no mobile phones in those days) "Sir, I have arranged for a series of hand signals leading from the door to the Lecture Theatre". Another "Good Show Ted" was his response. The day arrived and all was ready for the onslaught of guests for a 1.30 pm opening. The large Official party were suitably looked after, having attended a luncheon in the Point Cook Officers' Mess.

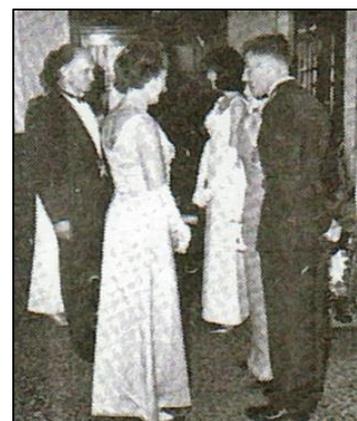
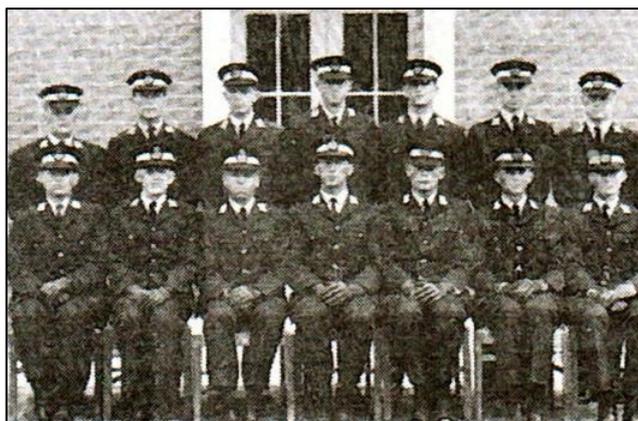
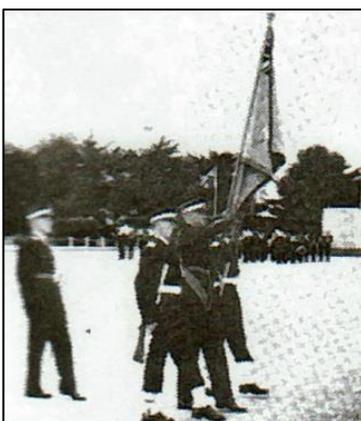
A threatening build up of thunder clouds began at about 12 noon and was looking even more ominous when the afternoon guests started to arrive. All were seated in the Lecture theatre when the Commandant, Air Cdre Parsons, welcomed the gathering and handed over to the Chancellor of the University to say his piece before the Minister was asked to officially open the building. He had hardly said "Good Afternoon, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen when the lights went out!!". As quick as a flash, the hand signals came into play and within 30 seconds "Bingo" light was restored and then would you believe out they went again, with no sign of coming to life in the foreseeable future and "why" you might ask?. Well and quite simply the genset had run out of petrol. The electrician, having been assured that it had plenty of

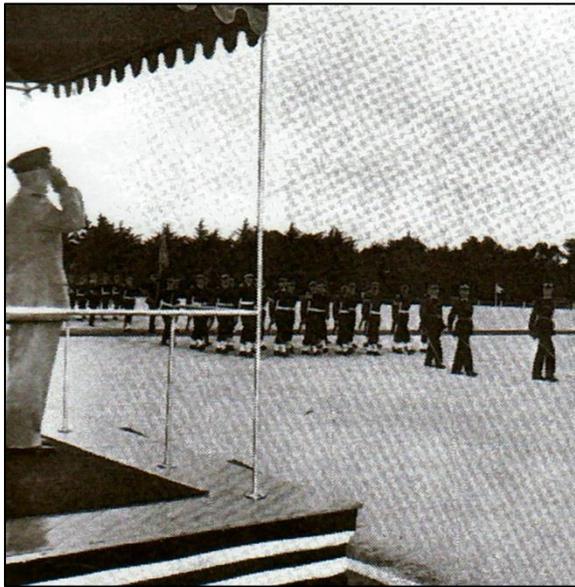
petrol had, with all the best intentions in the World, practised starting the generator and running it several times onsite during the morning. Both he and I were ready to pack our bags for a accompanying salutary punishment of a Posting to the Salt Mines of Siberia! Furthermore, and quite predictably, no “Good Shows Ted” from Group Captain Cowan either! To say that there were large numbers of crestfallen expressions among the RAAF hosts for the occasion was something of an understatement. Particularly as we had no option but to repair to the afternoon tea venue for a continuation of the “opening” programme among the “sandbo’s and sticky buns”

In my first year at the Academy I did look forward to the end of year build up for the Graduation Parade of the Senior (No 13 Course) quite a number of whom had been guests at my home during the year for a “home cooked” meal and a break from the daily routine at Point Cook Among them being Senior Under Officer Gary Beck (right) with whom I subsequently did a lot of flying when I was the Administrative Staff Officer/C O of the Unit HQ at RAAF East Sale in the early ‘70’s. Gary was O.C Flying at the School of Air Navigation. He retired with the rank of Air Vice Marshal. [\(Back\)](#)



The following photographs have been taken from the Academy’s Journal of 1965 (13 Course) and do highlight the type and mixture of activities involved on Graduation day and night.





[\(Back\)](#)

Whilst, and obviously, the Senior Course takes pride of place on Graduation Day the other three Courses have a “full on” appearance on the Parade Ground. The RAAF Central Band added to this very military style occasion as too did the many Guests including families of all the Cadets with pride of place being taken by those of the Graduation Class, Parliamentarians, V.I.P’s, Senior RAAF officers and other RAAF visitors. The Reviewing Officer was usually of Governor General status or, as on this occasion the Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederic Scherger KBE,CBE,CB DSO AFC. The finale of the Parade usually accompanied by low flying RAAF fighter aircraft from Williamtown and the quite emotional playing of “Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines “ with an encore of “Auld Lang Syne”.

(As an aside and jumping ahead from 1963 to 1985, I was indeed privileged ten years after my retirement and living on the Gold Coast to be invited to RAAF Point Cook for the final Graduation parade of the RAAF Academy by the assistant Commandant Gp Capt Gary Peck. I found it to be a more than expected emotional occasion. Seated among all the V.I.P’s and their families, many of whom I had served with during my 30 years in the RAAF. To witness once again, and for the final time, a Graduation of such moment was almost “too much” particularly with the playing of “Auld Lang Syne” but now back to the presence of 1963!).

Although being at Point Cook was not so very far from home, my “living in” three nights a week did not provide my presence at home. My mother was the anchor person of the family, back into an Australian life, no two young children she did decide to earlier capacity of Tertiary her pre marriage job at the Ballarat Secretary. She applied for a closely Girls School, from which not only the pay packet aided home continue to enjoy my time at of the Point Cook establishment.



with my family for much of any one week. My mother family after a few months of settling servants and the restrictiveness of seek a part time job preferably in her Education Administration, (similar to Teachers College the Principal’s allied position at the St Catherine’s “job satisfaction” emerged but also management. In the meantime I did R.A.A.F Base Point Cook. being part

[\(Back\)](#)

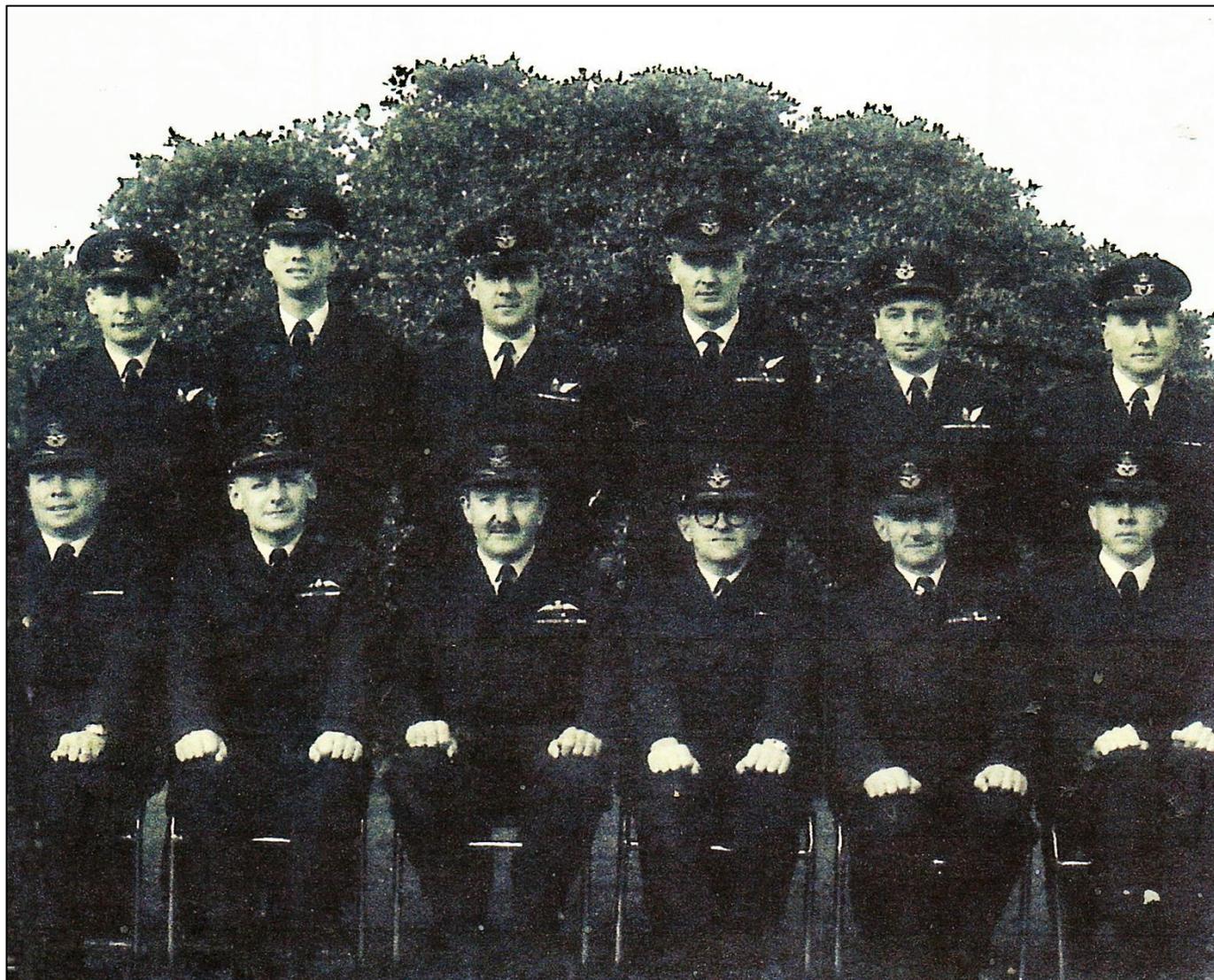
Being the birthplace of the RAAF it constantly felt something special to me. Halfway through my tour the Assistant Commandant position saw a change with Gp Capt Cowan's posting to Training Command HQ and being replaced by Gp Capt "Digger" Shiells famous for the variety of aircraft types he'd flown, from the extremes of the AVRVO Delta Wing to a Norseman Glider (as used in the infamous "Market Garden" operation in Holland during the second World War!), He was a keen squash and badminton player and often challenged me to an hour or two of both in the Base Gymnasium. These often climaxed in an invitation to his rather large prewar onBase married quarter for an evening meal with his delightful wife and three charming daughters. A minor midway change occurred with my situation in 1964 that being another posting at Point Cook namely to Officers Training School Directing Staff for duties as the Senior Air Force Law Instructor. I found this quite a challenge, particularly as this position also required me to set and mark the Air Force Law promotion examination for Flight Lieutenants. Another task was to regularly fly down to East Sale to lecture Air Electronic Officer and Navigator Cadet Courses in Air Force Law. A highlight of each visit involved strapping on a parachute and hopping into a Winjeel for the flight down to East Sale. My two favourite pilots for these jaunts were "Digger Shiells" and Tony Powell, both of whom allowed me to put into practice again my earlier flying experiences back in Cairns in 1945/46. Sadly not long after, Tony, an exRAF fighter pilot before joining the RAAF, was quite tragically killed, in a car accident, along with his mother and father who had come out from England to visit him.



**en route on many such flights to SAN Cadets at
RAAF Base East Sale [\(Back\)](#)**

With three Courses at a time running at OTS there were twelve members of the Directing Staff ten Flight Lieutenants, a Squadron Leader (Chief Instructor) and a Wing Commander (Commanding Officer:). They are shown in the photo below. The OTS buildings were located on the southern portion of the aerodrome right down on the sea weed laded foreshore of Port

Phillip Bay. The School was much better served some twenty years later when the RAAF Academy was absorbed into the new Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra OTS was renamed RAAF College and moved into the vacated Academy buildings. (a further move took place some years later when RAAF College relocated to the RAAF Base at East Sale.



Directing Staff, Officers Training School ([Back](#))

Standing LR: FI Lt West, FI Lt Boorman, FI Lt Jones, FI Lt Slevison, FI Lt Reed, FI Lt Smith.

Seated LR: FI Lt Ilton, Sqn Ldr Sandercock, Wg Cdr Guthrie, FI Lt Kewely, FI Lt Clark, FI Lt Topley.

After a further two years (1965 66) at Point Cook, and thankfully at last, promotion to Squadron Leader with effect from 1st January 1966, I was posted to No 1 Central Reserve at Kingswood in Sydney to be the Senior Admin Officer. Prior to this, as was the custom, in those days, Commanding Officers and Senior Admin Officer appointments were preceded by a CO's Short Law Course at OTS My Course photo is below :



CO's SHORT LAW COURSE OFFICERS TRAINING SCHOOL 1965 ([Back](#))

Rear LR: Sqn Ldr Lusink, Sqn Ldr Plenty, Sqn Ldr Boorman, Sqn Ldr Reid, Sqn Ldr Ramsay
Centre LR: Sqn Ldr Stenhouse, Sqn Ldr Walters, Gp Capt Prosser, Sqn Ldr Lang
Front LR: Sqn Ldr Michelson, Sqn Ldr Leach, Sqn Ldr Ilton, Sqn Ldr Walsh

MY POSTING TO RAAF KINGSWOOD. ([Back](#))

One of the "penalties of our return from Equatorial Malaysia to Victoria Australia was the infamous climate of that southern Australian State. We had arrived back in freezing cold Port Melbourne on Easter Monday 1963 from which all four of us succumbed to a severe bout of 'flu. Unfortunately 'Mattee suffered more than me and the two kids, her 'flu worsened to Bronchitis and, regrettably, to recurring asthmatic symptoms. One of the medications for Asthma relief at that time was Cortisone Steroids and which were eventually prescribed for her. Although this medication did provide considerable but spasmodic relief, she became a chronic asthmatic, with severe attacks often requiring hospitalisation and the accompanying rushed Ambulance to

hospital. Unfortunately, with our previous history of “clean bills of health” for the four of us, we were in the lowest Medical Benefit’s scheme (being in the RAAF I didn’t require Medical Benefits at all!) It was costing us a fortune in Ambulance and Hospital expenses. Among other things her Doctor was also “prescribing” a posting to a warmer climate with its accompanying benefits for respiratory weaknesses. As provision is made in the RAAF for nominating “Posting Preferences” three areas can be nominated and more often than not one of the three stated preferences would be granted. In my case I had elected Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin.

My posting mentioned above to the Sydney area was really welcomed. However it also meant once again what to do with our Melbourne house. On this occasion the decision was more one of liquidity rather than a straight forward leasing arrangement, this being brought about by the mounting medical bills associated with Mattee’s asthma. A further factor was the provision of a brand new married quarter waiting for us at the RAAF Base at Kingswood and for which the rental was quite reasonable. So we decided to sell Marlborough Street, pay off the Mortgage and use some of the balance to meet current and recurring medical bills. A further consideration to be taken into account was our plans for Gary’s secondary schooling to be effected in the coming year (1966) by his attending a Public School as we called them in Victoria (private schools in other States). To this end we had already booked him in to Brighton Grammar. My posting required my presence at Kingswood with effect from 1st October 1965 and my Married Quarter, still under construction, was not due for completion until just prior to Christmas. Accordingly, we arranged for a contract completion date on our house to be the 30th December 1965. Our Removal to Kingswood and occupancy of our new M.Q would then be from 1st January 1966 and for Gary to be enrolled at a local Grammar School within a reasonable vicinity of Kingswood (Penrith) NSW.

Despite Mattee’s asthma problems she was able to undertake a couple of trips to Sydney for curtain, carpet selection etc for our new M.Q. As for Gary’s new school for 1966 and still to be sought, we did not foresee any particular difficulties arising. We agreed that I would chase this up with a view for effecting enrolment before the commencement of the 1966 School Year. My being insitu at Kingswood some three months before the family moved up from Melbourne also allowed me to prepare the lawn and garden preliminaries in our new house and at the same time “flushout” Gary’s school selection for the New Year. The obvious place to start looking was the Yellow Pages of the Sydney Telephone Directory and with the first consideration being relative close proximity to Kingswood. Only two Private Schools met the latter criteria one the “Blue Mountains Grammar: at Katoomba and the other “The Kings School” at Parramatta. The latter would be preferred due to a closer proximity to Kingswood and an excellent rail service. In the event both schools had no vacancies, Even worse, the Kings School had a waiting list for years and years ahead. In learning the latter from the Headmaster of the Prep School I reacted with a comment about Servicemen at times being treated as second class citizens. He responded by inviting me down to his School when he might then be able to make some suggestions about Gary’s secondary schooling.

I accepted this invitation and an appointment was made which coincided with a RAAF duty visit down to Sydney following which I would be able to visit him on the way back!. This was agreed to, also the old axiom of being a “small world” happening came quite remarkably to the fore!!. The Headmaster turned out to be the RAAF Chaplain that I met and with whom I became quite friendly when in Japan and Korea in the early ‘50’s and there had not been any discussions at that times about his pre RAAF background. It wasn’t until our Kings School meeting, nearly twenty years later that his long connection with the Kings School and his eventual elevation to

Headmaster of the Kings Prep School were revealed to me. It was then that he also told me about how he had amassed a huge amount of Long Service Leave during his many years at Kings and that the School Council had directed that he had to expend the twelve months involved. Quite coincidentally he saw a RAAF Recruiting Notice inviting applicants for RAAF Chaplaincy service in Korea and Japan for a minimum of twelve months. He then went on to tell me of the School's long held policy of an annual "slot" provision for sons of the Clergy to be enrolled in the King's Prep School.

Fortuitously, at this particular time, the "slot" had not yet been allocated. In the event, and if it remains vacant, it could be possible for it to be allocated to Gary. This indeed did happen and he completed his entire six years of Secondary schooling at the Kings School in Parramatta, the latter having been setup to coincide with our move to Kingswood. We then arranged for our daughter Robyn to be enrolled at the Penrith Primary School where she spent the next two years. Then in 1968 I was posted to Canberra where I was to undergo the Command and Staff College Course. Gary was transferred from a Kings School Day Boy to a Boarder in 1968 and became during this period the Quarter Master Sergeant of the Kings School Cadet Corps. I hasten to say that the 60's "Bodgey long haired" and "Drug" syndromes that was creating worrying social changes among teenagers thankfully did not intrude into the Parramatta Kings School quadrangles!

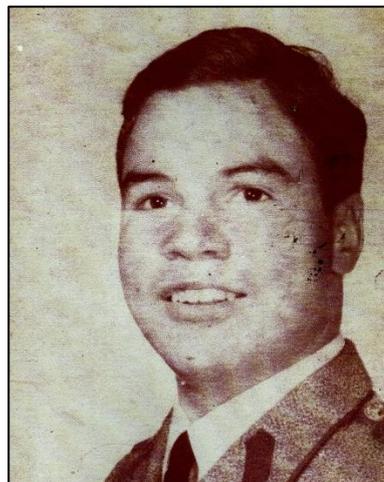
Quite, to the contrary. the School management shielded their students admirably and proudly



A SENIOR PREPSCHOOL GROUP



THE CADET CORPS ON PARADE ([Back](#))



Gary E Ilton, Quarter Sergeant Cadet Corps
The Kings School
Parramatta 19661972 ([Back](#))

NO 1 CENTRAL RESERVE, formed in April 1942

(Renamed No 1 Central Ammunition Depot in 1967)

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No 1 Central Reserve was originally formed as a Central Reserve at Marrangaroo NSW on 1 April 1942 under the Command of Sqn Ldr G S Anderson with Sub depots at Moorebank and Glenbrook. The Unit's primary role was the storage and supply of munitions for the Royal Australian Air Force. The establishment of the Unit at the time of occupying the first Barracks in 1942 were six officers and 121 airmen, At the cessation of hostilities the role of the Unit was for storage only and this remained unchanged until August 1952 with the war in Korea and the RAAF's involvement with No 77 Squadron with munitions being issued firstly in Japan (Bofu/Iwakuni) and subsequently at Kimpo in Korea (where it will have been noted in earlier pages of this book my involvement in both Iwakuni Japan and Kimpo Korea), In the early 50's, much of the domestic acreage at Marrangaroo was being utilised for National Servicemen Training resulting in the Central Reserve HQ being transferred to Orchard Hills (Kingswood) initially with Explosive storage remaining at Marrangaroo as Detachment "A" until 1958 of No 1 Central Reserve.



The RAAF had first begun using Kingswood for explosive storage in 1945 in order to avoid double handling of explosives on consignment to and from Sydney and also with local storage whilst awaiting onforwarding to the Northwest and New Guinea., Both the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy also used the area for explosive storage purposes. In the late 50's to the early 60's, a redevelopment programme was put in place for the Kingswood Depot. New Airmen and Sergeants' Messes were constructed, the former "homestead" property was used for Officer accommodation until an Officers' Mess was constructed at the same time as the new Headquarters building (1965). Also, as previously mentioned Married Quarters were being constructed as part of the development programme. Most of these were to be occupied by the 18 to 20 officers who, by this time, were on the staff (refer to the next pages photograph where this officer strength had reached 20 in number. Another, and rather unique, feature of the Kingswood establishment, was its delightful Golf Course made possible by the policy of only essential buildings in the domestic area of ammunition depots!.. So, a considerable amount of grassland was kept clear and at the same time had to be kept closely mowed. The area concerned was large enough to make possible a nine hole Golf Course and, by utilising 18

different tees a normal round of golf was possible. Moreover, the “old” Officer quarters were retained and put into good use as a Golf Club house



AERIAL VIEW OF RAAF KINGSWOOD ([Back](#))

(Background is the Explosive Storage Area
Mid foreground lower is Domestic Area and
foreground shows portion of the Golf Course)

Although Kingswood was at no time specifically mentioned among my “Posting Preferences”, I, as with many RAAF personnel who liked to hit a golf ball, often heard about what “CenRes” had become known as i.e. **“The RAAF’s Country Club”**. This name was particularly popular with many RAAF golfers on the posted strength of HQ Operational Command at “Glenbrook”, about a 30 to 45 minute drive away. I hasten to say here and now, that my posting to Kingswood, coupled with my promotion and the warmer climate needs for Mattee suited me perfectly as I was hoping for a relatively small sized Base for my first senior Admin job. Coupled with these facts, there were the new Married Quarter and Gary’s schooling to contend with all of which made me quite excited with a “bring it on” attitude. Christmas being just around the corner and all the woes of packing and moving were soon with us! As too was the preoccupation with house sale activities.. The joyous activities of the Festive Season were dampened a little on this occasion because of the selling of our house and the packing of all our bits and pieces in readiness for our move to “northern parts”.

A week or so before we left there had been an horrendous thunderstorm during which our cat disappeared. We were greatly saddened by this. Our dog Laddy seemed reluctant to hop into the car when it came time to leave and we wondered if he was also still looking for the cat. The characteristics of a "Country Club" rather than an Airforce establishment soon became evident as we drove up to the main gate of RAAF Central Reserve Kingswood. Another nonRAAF characteristic was the Security provisions of the Naval Dockyard Police which gave emphasis to the fact that these were "shared" facilities for RAAF and RAN. We were impressed with the Rose gardens on each side of the entrance road and a large orange grove to complement this "CountryClub" atmosphere. We were certainly pleased to see that our Removalist Truck had also arrived and was waiting outside our new Married Quarter to unload. The one disappointment was the absence of a garage. There was only a carport with a shed attached. The lawn that I had planted and the garden beds, flowers at the front and vegies at the back, were looking really nice and I was pleased that I had been able to do this beforehand. Another feature was that we had been able to choose the carpet, Mattee had flown up for a couple of days just before Christmas when we selected the carpet and curtains from David Jones I think, in Parramatta and I had arranged for them to be put into place in the various parts of the house before we moved in.

The only thing still to be bought was Gary's Kings School uniform, this too was a David Jones item. I must say that I benefited considerably as a result of my preceding the family into Kingswood by about three months. Not only did I have a "handle" on my job by this time, but also got to know most of the Staff, particularly the officers. The C.O's house was also brand new and was still to be occupied. Wing Commander Hunt, whose family were in Sydney, lived in the Officers' Mess and had indicated his intention to seek early retirement in mid1965. In the event he did retire early and Wing Commander Therkelsen had been posted in as the new C.O but was retained in Canberra on a "Temporary Duty" basis to finalise a Report that he had been putting together on the RAAF's Armament Officer manning difficulties. In the event this arrangement lasted six months. Sqn Ldr Northey acted as Temporary C.O for nearly six months before the actual arrival of Wg Cdr Therkelsen. I had what was a in a way a "backdoor" conduit with Wg Cdr Therkelsen by keeping him in the picture with a virtual Kingswood Canberra "loop". We also managed to keep the C.O's Married Quarter unoccupied until the Therkelsens arrived.

As for my impressions to date for the likely types of job satisfaction ahead of me, I must say that it began with the C.O, Wg Cdr Hunt, whom I first met at Laverton when he was President of the Officers' Mess Committee, (you might recall the previous story when the "new" Officers' Mess Manager at Laverton, Flt Lt Whitehead. appeared at a Dining In Night dressed as a Nursing Sister and Wg Cdr Hunt as PMC had to handle this rather indelicate behavioural matter). He did impress me and when I learned that he would be my C.O at Kingswood I rather warmed to the prospect, My expectations were quickly heightened in the first few weeks that we were there as a family. Mattee's asthma had provoked several ambulance "dashes" to the Penrith hospital which in turn took me away from my desk without any reluctance from the C.O. He was so understanding and concerned. We did get on extremely well and I was quite disappointed when he sought his early retirement. This did provide an occasion where he would be able to depart with a Military style "fanfare". There was then a long held British Custom, for bestowing an Honorary higher rank than the substantive rank held at their retirement date, In this case, the higher rank was Group Captain and carried with it the embellishment of "scrambled eggs" on the peak of one's officer cap. I organised a new cap for the C.O complete with the said embellishment. It was arranged that following a final luncheon in

the Officers' Mess all the officers would present themselves at the HQ building where the new headdress would be presented to the C.O by the then temporary C.O Sqn Ldr Keane. Following which he was escorted down to a waiting LandRover a la the Popemobile, or even one of the Royal Variety, for a drive past the assembled staff members on either side of the road leading to the main gate. It was quite a moving occasion for all concerned.



**SQN LDR KEANE PRESENTING WG CDR HUNT'S
"SCRAMBLED EGG" CAP 1966 [\(Back\)](#)**

LR: Plt Off Prendergast, Flt Lt Ouston, Flg Off Miller, Flt Lt Rose, Flt Lt McEwan, Flt Lt Dunnill, Flt Lt O'Brien, Flt Lt O'Conner, Sqn Ldr Leonard, Flt Lt (name forgotten), Flg Off Alexander, Sqn Ldr Ilton, Flt Lt (name forgotten), Flt Lt Northey, Flt Lt Blight, Sqn Ldr Turton, Flt Lt (name forgotten).

I must confess that at the time I had no illusions about the likelihood of reaching the rank of Group Captain. However, the next rank that I might reach would be Wing Commander and then if I served for at least four years in that rank I would be entitled to the honorary rank of Group Captain as had happened with Wg Cdr Hunt. However, and sadly to all those affected, when Gough Whitlam became Prime Minister, he rid the Country of British Honours and Awards including the custom of awarding honorary rank to officers of the Australian Defence Force.

A “legacy” left behind by Wg Cdr Hunt was the way he had encouraged local businessmen participation with the Social life of the Officer’s Mess. The relatively small number of Officers at Kingswood needed boosting in some way for successful Mess functions. This had been achieved by Wg Cdr Hunt offering Honorary Mess membership to local (Penrith) businessmen. In the event about two dozen were invited to become Honorary Members of the RAAF Kingswood Officers’ Mess. This in many ways created a most successful Public Relations combination coveted by those involved.



WG CDR HUNT A DEPARTING “LAP OF HONOUR” ([Back](#))

Contrary to our expectations of “better weather better Mattee”.....We were only in our new environment for a couple of weeks when sadly her asthma attacks returned and with them a series of hospitalisation ensued. It was a lot sadder for her, not only because of her physical discomforts but also she was unable to enjoy our new home and more importantly the preparations for both Gary and Robyn’s new schooling. Robyn’s was quite straight forward i.e a RAAF bus met an early morning train at Penrith from which personnel used to be transported to and from work. Robyn was able to use this bus each morning and afternoon. In Gary’s case I had ascertained from the Railways that there was a morning train from Katoomba which came through Penrith at 7.20 am and arrived at Parramatta at 7.55 and which then connected with a bus to Gary’s new school. Unfortunately at that time I was unaware of a Sydney train time table contingency where some trains “put down” but did not “pickup”.

I soon was made aware of this as I was accompanying Gary on his first days travel to the Kings School. We sat down on a couple of seats on what was quite a lovely train in fact one that ran every morning and night for daily Sydney commuters each of whom had reserved seats. I was made even more aware of our transgression when a Ticket Collector asked for our tickets and then admonished us for “being picked up” when not entitled. I went to great lengths to explain the importance of this particular train for Gary’s daily schooling. The Conductor seemed to warm to my explanation and quickly said I should write to the Commissioner of Railways and for Gary to carry with him a copy of the letter until such time as a decision was made on the matter. As it turned out, my letter was favourably received Gary was given dispensation to travel on that particular train as were others who became Kings School students.

The rather strange atmosphere of an Ammunition Depot suggests one of a sort of inertness. Examination and safety aspects were of course paramount but the actual use of a particular Store not being exercised stimulated some monotony of a daily work programme. This was to change when the war in Vietnam prompted the bombing activities of No 2 Squadron's Canberra bombers. This in turn required the supply of bombs from No 1 Central Reserve's stores. Exercise "Rapid Pack" was mounted at Kingswood reminding each of us that we were members of a Defence Force and that our "blunt end" was a trigger for our "Brothers in Active Service" at the "sharp end". It was too, as a result of "Rapid Pack" and the extremely sensitive and uncomfortable working conditions of our troops down in the Explosive Area particularly during the Summer months, that I thought of how welcome would a Unit swimming pool be for a lunchtime or after work swim. As Chairman of Welfare, I arranged for a loan from the RAAF's Central Welfare which was used for the building of a Swimming pool in the Domestic area and repaid from Unit endeavours.

What with our own Golf Course and now a Swimming Pool too, these two amenities were great morale boosters and added to the appropriateness of calling our Unit "The Country Club". Neither Mattee nor I had previously had any serious golf interests, certainly not having had any Golf Club membership. This was soon to change, aided and abetted by our close proximity to the Golf Course and the Club house, both only a few minutes' walk from our Married Quarter. Although Mattee's health prevented her from taking part in any competitive aspects of a Golf Club, she did make the most, state of health permitting, of the walking facilities that the Course offered. Regrettably these occasions were few and far between.

At one time, she was rushed to St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney by Ambulance where she spent a few weeks in intensive care. I drove down to Sydney every night, thanks to the "child minding" assistance of one of our neighbours, Sqn Ldr Alan Turton and his wife Bev, who had two children, a boy and a girl, the same age as our two. It was a worrying, and extremely expensive time for us as a family. Fortunately, new asthma treatments and medications stabilised her daytoday health condition to the extent that in our second year at Kingswood Mattee enjoyed her best health for some years. This allowed me to pursue studies for the RAAF Staff College entry Examination as well as being a prerequisite for promotion to Wing Commander. It was with considerable relief that the news came through that I had not only passed the examination but had also been accepted for the 1968 12 months Staff College Course in Canberra. I was highly delighted about this news particularly as there was only one place per year for qualified officers of the Special Duties Branch of which I was a member. However, it also called for some other circumstances arising from this posting to Canberra, Gary's remaining or moving from Kings? If he remained it would have to be as a Boarder and we would also need to find some "temporary" accommodation in Canberra for ourselves. I had hoped that the Defence Department would provide a subsidy for the increased College fees associated with Boarding. This did not happen so we made the decision to pay the higher fees with the hope that Mattee might be able to obtain employment in Canberra. We would also need to find some temporary accommodation while I was undergoing the Staff College Course.

Both of these aspects would work out quite well. Firstly as to "temporary" A.C.T accommodation, a good mate of mine Wing Commandeer Geoff Michael owned a house in the Canberra suburb of Campbell which he rented out each year to Staff College Students. I contacted him (in the USA where he was on exchange with the USAF for two years) he agreed to my renting his Campbell house for all of 1968. At the same time I heard of a job for Secretary to the Bursar of Canberra Grammar School and to which Mattee successfully applied. With the

Posting to Staff College was also time for some reflections on our two years at No 1 Central Reserve. There is little doubt that if it had not been overshadowed by Mattee's health problems it would have been an even more rewarding experience for each of us. Both Gary and Robyn settled in to their new school experiences together with the close knit community environment offered by what was a relatively small Air Force population. The Golf Course provided a delightful rural backdrop as well as being a great recreational asset. The Fauna and Flora attributes of the Unit's Real Estate reflected a delightful peaceful atmosphere. The acquisition of a swimming pool was also a great attraction during the very hot summer months of the Kingswood district. My day to day office activities were many and varied. In addition, not long after I arrived the CO. appointed me to be the President of the Officers' Mess Committee or P.M.C. As would have been noted by the photograph on an earlier page, our officer numbers were around the twenty mark, the majority of whom lived in the Unit Married Quarters. Mess social life was bolstered considerably by the number of Honorary Members we had appointed from the local Penrith Business district. Wing Commander Hunt had made special efforts to boost the Officers' Mess Honorary Membership list, the success of which could be measured by the great interest each of whom showed when responding to Mess social functions. We had three or four mixed Dining In Nights on the Officers' Mess Annual Social calendar one of which I remember so well for its success was a "Dinner a la Henry the Eighth" which required that the entire meal to be consumed with one's fingers. Soup in a cup, prawns in Aspic, vegies in pastry cases, chicken drumsticks, etc etc. I must say it was a great success too!

Being in close proximity to the RAAF's Operational Command Headquarters at Glenbrook (about 25 kms distance and at the foot of the Blue Mountains) also encouraged Officers from there to attend our Mess functions. In addition they were invited to take part in our regular; Saturday Golf competitions.

The Golf Club was a tremendously popular part of the Unit's sporting and social activities. Being an allRanks Club, there needed to be some Rank relaxations on the Course and in the Club House with formalities concerning the usage of the "Sir" salutation. It became an unwritten rule that anywhere on the Course or in the Club House rank formalities were waived. As an aside, a similar "Rank" waiver policy arose at Butterworth (as mentioned elsewhere in this book). I was involved in the formation of a Golf Course and Golf Club on the Base at Butterworth and this Rank waiver practice worked very well there too. Although on one occasion I remember AVM Susans (OC IADS) was involved. He played every Saturday, usually with his young Flt Lt Aide and on this occasion the AVM's name was called out as having won a trophy. His Aide got up to accept it when one "wag" called out to the Aide "Sit down and let the Buggar go up and get it himself", a certain amount of merriment ensued and the AVM took it all in good part and walked up to get his trophy!



RAAF STAFF COLLEGE TRAINING. [\(Back\)](#)

As I mentioned earlier, the initial prerequisite for selection for the undergoing of Staff College training was

to pass the "Q" (Qualifying) Examination. Moreover, the passing of this exam was also required for eligibility for promotion to Wing Commander. In both cases, there was no automatic selection either for Staff College training or Promotion. In the former case, with only 24 vacancies per Course per annum, for Staff College training, available, it was a highly selective process.

In a conceptual sense, the three preparatory tasks of a Staff College are to facilitate the objectives of "Military" Staff Officer training and can be expressed as follows:

- to assist selected officers to think clearly and express themselves
- to teach them Staff duties, and
- to provide a background knowledge of the organisation and operations of their particular Service i.e. Navy, Army and Air Force together with "Joint Service" doctrines.

RAAF Staff College students were generally from senior Flight Lieutenant and Squadron Leader ranks. The duration of the Course was originally determined to be of six months but in the mid 50's was lengthened to 12 months.

The pre-selection criteria required an assessment being made of a particular officer's potential for promotion to the senior ranks and ultimate Commander appointments. Having regard to these selection criteria and my being in the relatively small Special Duties and Admin Branch with only one slot per year, I was highly delighted to be selected for No 22 Course in 1968.

Until the late 1980's each of the three Australian Services had a Staff College. The RAAF College began with No 1 Course at Point Cook in 1948 and moved to RAAF Base Fairbairn in 1960 where it remained until December 1988 when ending with Number 42 Course. A Graduation Roll of the College since inception forty years earlier totals around 2000 persons.

I was also fortunate to be involved with a dramatic change to removal expense entitlements. Formerly, a Posting duration had to be for a minimum of two years to be eligible for Removal Expenses. This meant for all previous Staff College Courses, being of only twelve months duration, all removal costs were at the members' expense, there being no entitlement for Removal expenses.

This resultant in either moving the family at one's own expense or proceeding unaccompanied for the twelve month period, a very unsatisfactory experience.



22 RAAF Staff Course
22Jan68 06Dec68

Back Row LR: Sqn Ldr N Raffin, Sqn Ldr P Malley, Sqn Ldr E Browne, Maj O O'Brien, Wng Cdr J Kichenside, Wng Cdr F Slater, Wng Cdr T Philpott, Lt Cdr B Dunn, Wng Cdr J PulestonJones, Sqn Ldr P Brown, Sqn Ldr R Ramsey.

Middle Row LR: Sqn Ldr R Viney, Wng Cdr E Whitehead, Sqn Ldr A Cushman, Sqn Ldr D Lancaster, Sqn Ldr J Chersterfield, Wng Cdr M Outhwaite, Sqn Ldr M Bannerman, Sqn Ldr A Ilton, Sqn Ldr T Johnson, Sqn Ldr R Barnes, Sqn Ldr E Plenty, Sqn Ldr T Thorpe, Sqn Ldr K Tuckwell.

Seated LR: Flt Lt G Gibb, Wng Cdr A Arnel, Wng Cdr K Tongue, Wng Cdr R Rowell, Wng Cdr R Robinson, Grp Capt D Hurditch, Wng Cdr K Brinsley, Wng Cdr K Kerrisk, Wng Cdr H Parker, Wng Cdr L Britt, Lt Col H Witt.

BACK TO CANBERRA. ([Back](#))

I must confess to not expecting to return to Canberra nearly ten years since our last posting there and certainly not as a member of a Staff College Course. When studying for the Q Examination in 1967 it was primarily for gaining eligibility for promotion to Wing Commander. Being aware of the fact that my Branch had only one slot for Staff College Course training each year, my age (40) and my lacking in Tertiary qualifications, which was then a common perquisite for postgraduate studies, I quite truthfully had never considered that I would be selected for Staff College. When my posting to the Course came whilst I was at Kingswood, (October 1967), I was absolutely highly delighted. Fortuitously, there was also another (but unrelated), reason for me wanting to move from I Cen Res Kingswood. Due to a communication problem (misunderstanding) an unpleasant personality conflict had arisen between me and the C.O, Wg Cdr Therkelsen, from which I believed could only be satisfactorily resolved by a separation. My posting to Staff College was indeed a timely resolution for what had become a most difficult dilemma.

The other matters at the same time which created some preoccupation for us were Gary's remaining behind at Kings School as a Boarder and somewhere for us to live in Canberra. I was hoping that Child Education Allowance provisions would satisfy the Boarding Fees for Gary

and I had learned of a house in Canberra that we could rent (as mentioned earlier). The housing situation was rather good particularly as it was located in Campbell just a few blocks away from the house we had been allocated back in 1959. We moved the second week in December and were quite well settled in time for a pleasant Christmas.

Fortunately Mattee's health had improved considerably and she was quite happy to seek some employment in order to make the payment of Gary's Boarding fees a bit easier to manage. The Bursar' Secretary job at Canberra Grammar School came up to which Mattee had successfully applied. The Bursar was a former Air Commodore in the RAAF who I knew quite well. With everything seemingly falling into place and our furniture and effects well in situ we were ready for our new life in 1968.

My commitments at Staff College required living in at the College at Fairbairn and being home on Wednesday night and weekends. Also we travelled around a lot as part of our Course, both around Australia and overseas, two of the latter occasions being to New Guinea and Indonesia. I took it on myself to be the Social Secretary for the Course with an arrangement of a \$2.00 levy each pay day from which would be apportioned to various Social activities either at the Fairbairn Officers Mess or other local social venues.

One of the great strengths of the Royal Australian Air Force, particularly of my era, was a big (and close but prevailing widespread) family attitude. This was much noticeable among the commissioned ranks. Testimony to this was the pleasing fact that the twentyfour members of my Course No 22 were each already quite well known to one another. There was an obviously predominant number of General Duties (Air Crew) officers, a smaller number of Engineering and Logistic Officers and I was the only Admin Branch member. The majority of us were Squadron Leaders, a few Wing Commanders, an RAN Lt Cdr, an ARA Major and one RAF Sqn Ldr. The average age would have been about 36/37. I was, at age 41, one of the three eldest. Despite some differences in age and also ranks of Course members it had become a common doctrine among the Directing Staff, for the first three months of each Course, to treat the Student as if they knew nothing. We were split into four Syndicates, each of six and each with a Syndicate Leader from the Directing Staff. As to the latter, our indoctrination was made more palatable, even bearable, as our Syndicate Leader was a United States Air Force Exchange officer Lieutenant Colonel Harry Witt (Right).

[\(Back\)](#)

Harry was on a two year exchange posting to the RAAF Staff College. The first year to attend as a Student (he was on No 21 Course) and then the next twelve months as a Directing Staff member. Although this was fortyfive years ago now I can still remember how he kept us sane during the first three months of the Course. Among other things was his colourful military aviation background. He had joined the Royal Air Force before the US entered WWII, a living example of a "Yank in the RAF". He still wore his RAF pilot's brevet and decorations on the right breast of his uniform and the USAF equivalent on the other breast. We quite jokingly and to his enjoyment, christened him "Walter Mitty"!!



The Staff College campus at Fairbairn was not conspicuous by any buildings of grandeur being of (temporary) World War II construction. This was accompanied by a matching lack of interior temperature control. Hot in the summer and extremely cold in the winter. One of the earlier

Courses had courageously (and arguably quite appropriately) signposted the Street leading to the Staff College Headquarters as Sesame Street. This sign was obviously some light hearted gibery at the folklore of Student "immaturity" on arrived at the College. Sadly and despite the many years that the Street sign had so aptly prompted the appropriate Student perception, a senior Air Rank officer decreed that the sign be removed forthwith.

The Officers' Mess, although also of W.W.II vintage, was not unattractive and did become something of a haven for Staff College Students. However, the Student accommodation at the Mess matched pretty much the temporary nature of the Campus. Wartime huts being an apt description. With eight rooms to a hut, each room had a small study with ablutions and toilets at the end of each hut. Temperature control matched the lack of it as with the Campus buildings. Regrettably building upgrades to follow the move from Point Cook to Canberra in the early 1950's had not eventuated as late as 1968 when our Course arrived. In fact, even during the remaining 30 odd years of the Staff College existence at Fairbairn, the only major building change was at the Campus with a purpose built Auditoriums and Library. Right from the outset, students were able to study the Programme for the year, the Tasks to be written along the way, with the lead time for each and the Visits to be made. Despite these lead time there was often a mad rush to finish an Assignment each which had to be typewritten. The latter posing some problems for the many who did not have a typing capability. (in some cases, stenographic wives were able to come to the rescue, some DS's would annotate comments alluding to a wife having a good grasp of the subject matter in an Assignment!).

Public Speaking was an early topic for each Student, the first one being titled "Speakeasy" a 15 minute presentation on a favoured topic, One that comes to mind was the presentation by Major Owen O'Brien titled "The Good Things of Life A Cigar and a Good Wine". These presentations were always scheduled for the first Session after lunch. Owen had foregone his lunch and spent the time in the lecture room creating an "atmosphere of cigar smoke and appropriate wine bottle ambience". It was so successful that a few weeks later he organised a "winetasting evening" in the Officers' Mess to which wives would be included. The most favoured wine of the many to be tasted would be selected This too was a most successful occasion and the wine selected became the Course Wine with an appropriate "Autographed with Names" label On each of our many visits, both in Australia and overseas, Owen would have a bottle of the Course Wine as a presento to our Host/Hostess. An interesting aside to this was a later "Exercise Wine Shift". Owen had been a Bachelor for about ten years before our Course and served for a lot of his time in Victoria and Melbourne. His love of wine produced a large cellar of "favourite drops" which he needed to shift to his house in Canberra. One of our visits in a Herc to Melbourne provided the opportunity to shift 20 cases of the "Grape Juice" to Canberra.

I think I can safely say that one of the best highlights of our twelve months on the Staff College Course was our trip to Indonesia. The significance of the trip being, despite its relative lowlevel of diplomacy composition it was undoubtedly one of neighbourly restoration. For some years prior to 1968 there had been what had been labelled as International Confrontation between our two countries. Various ways of seeking atonement of this situation were commenced in the late '60's one of which was a visit of the Royal Australian Air Force Staff College Course to the Indonesian Air Force Staff College at Bandung calling at Port Moresby and Lae en route. What seemed to be a strange coincidence to us was that included in their Staff College syllabus were similar, in fact in some cases identical, settings to our own Syllabus and which we had copied from the RAF College Syllabus. One in particular concerned the Faquir of Ipi and aerial

interdiction over the Khyber Pass where I think we had used Hawker Demons but the Indonesians were using I think SE5's of WWI. We did have a most memorial time which climaxed at their College and where secondary school students entertained us with their Cultural tunes and dance climaxing in their quiet but most melodious singing of "Waltzing Matilda ". The attached photos of both the Indonesia and New Guinea ports of call are included here.



Above: Wg Cdr J Kitchenside and Sqn Ldr J Chesterfield with Indonesian AF Officer.



Right: Sqn Ldr Tom Thorpe and Sqn Ldr Ken Tuckwell with Indonesian AF Officer. ([Back](#))



Above: Lt Col H Witt giving some important advice to Wg Cdr K Kerrisk.

Sculpture in wood? No, a music maker.



[\(Back\)](#)

RAAF Squadron Leader Ted Ilton, of Bentleigh, listens to an explanation about a traditional musical instrument during a recent tour of Indonesia.

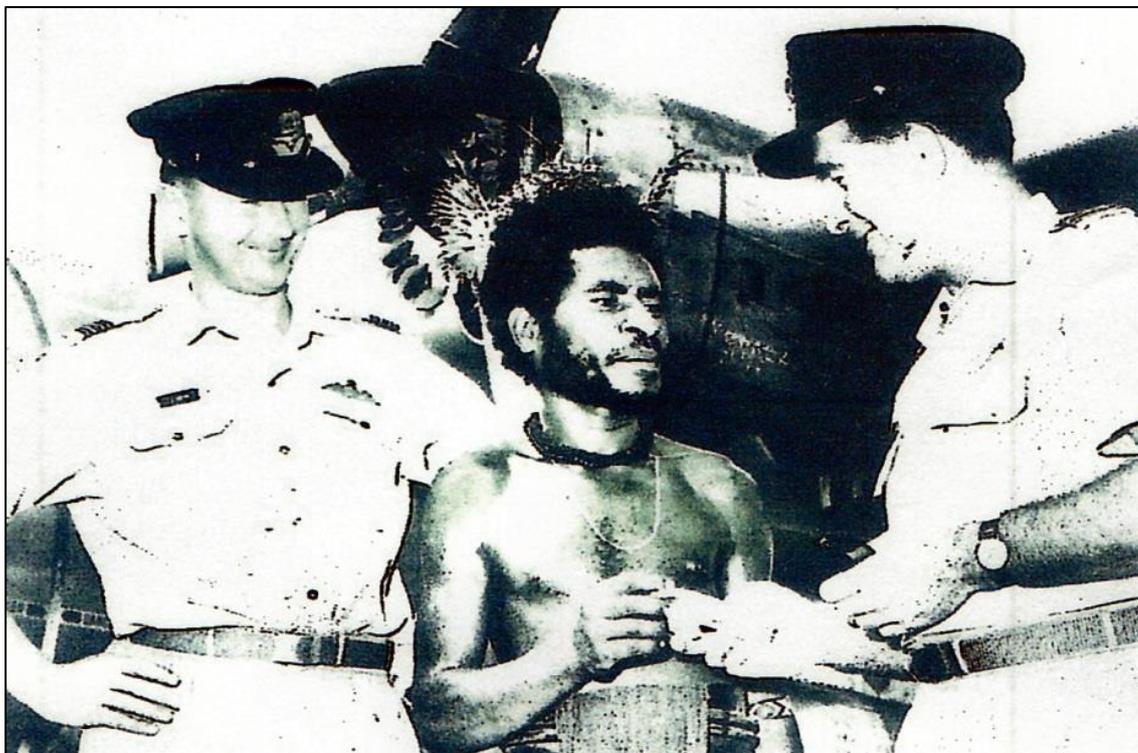
Sqn Ldr Ilton was at the Auri Staff College, Lembang when the woman, a performer, describe the instrument, known as an Angklung.

Sqn Ldr Ilton was a one of 24 students of the RAAF Staff College which was on tour. The trip was included in this year's college syllabus after an invitation from Air Chief Marshal Roesmin, Commander in Chief of the Indonesian Air Force.

During their 9,000 mile trip in the RAAF Hercules, the group visited the Indonesian Air Force College at Bandung and saw the Air Force Academy at Jogjakarta.

They saw active volcanoes in Indonesia, tea plantations in New Guinea and in both countries gained first hand knowledge of local social and economic conditions.

Newspaper article.



Above: Sqn Ldr P Browne and Sqn Ldr R Barnes with PNG local.

The three Objects of the Staff College were:

- to assist officers to think clearly and express themselves briefly,
- to teach them staff duties and
- to provide a background knowledge of the organisation and operations of the Service,

so enabling graduates to carry out staff duties appropriate to their respective ranks, have, in the broad sense, changed little over the years. In some things at least, the more things change, the more they really do stay the same. It would not be making too fine a point of it by my quoting this little piece of philosophy, copied from a subsequent history of the RAAF Staff College, "Strategy and Red Ink" authored by Group Captain (Ret'd) Doug Hurst.

As a group and early in the piece there was little doubt among us that the D.S were in fact treating us as if there was a need, to them anyway, for dramatic change in raising our level of maturity We quickly downgraded ourselves as being "un persons" and even had a necktie made carrying with it the large emblazonment of the letters "U.P". This "tag" often tainted the assessments given by Directing Staff to our written assignments which also were a bane of our life at Staff College! We were often reminded of this where individual efforts were required to meet deadlines at different times of the year, last minute scrambling, midnight oil, 60 cigarettes a day etc. The 'red ink apprehensions' with DS comments on a 30 page paper reduced to one large comment in red at the top of the first page, including one classic I saw "Barely satisfactory but soundly so"! Another "classic" was seen during our visit to Queenscliff Army

Staff College, where I perceived the Army D.S apparently used the same “doctrine” as our Staff College! We arrived midmorning and our entry into the 'Common Room' area coincided with the handing back of assignments through the student's mail pigeon holes. One young Major after reading his front page assessment shouted with joy when he sighted the big red 'Good'. However, this was quickly followed by an almost deathly moan when an asterisk after Good led him to the bottom of the page where it read 'after Good read God!'.

One thing that emerged from this is that Australian Army Officer Staff Course training also has leanings towards students being “un persons” in the eyes of their Directing Staff. Whilst on the subject of the Army Staff College at Queenscliff we did have a wonderful week with them as we did with the many other interesting places that we visited during our “crowded” year. One particularly interesting, and involving our “Senior” Service, the RAN, was a week at the Naval Air Station at Nowra on the South Coast of New South Wales. It was all the more interesting given that annual visits by the RAAF Staff College to the RAN had ceased six years earlier, when a couple of the lads of the visiting No 16 (I think?) Staff College Course decided that an oil painting of Admiral Lord Nelson which had pride of place over the Ward Room fireplace mantel, needed some embellishment. The painting being in close proximity to the fireplace had been encased in glass to protect it but in no way did it obscure the finery of the buttons, aiguelettes, sashes, Orders and Decorations which adorned the Admirals resplendent figure.

[\(Back\)](#)



[\(Back\)](#)

Our lads decided it just needed the addition of a pair of RAAF pilot's gold wings on the left breast of Lord N. So down came the painting in the dead of the night, quickly secreted in a RAAF Fairbairn bound motor car closely attended by the several valiant members of No 16 Course. On arrival at Fairbairn, by prior arrangement, the painting was unloaded in the paint shop at Fairbairn. The glass was carefully removed and on the reverse of the glass a pair of RAAF Gold Pilots wings was carefully painted. When sufficiently dried the glass was then carefully replaced and there, viola, was his Admiralty-ship resplendent in his Mess Dress and

his new acquired airman status. The painting was back in its home position before breakfast. Our miscreant "lads" had been unaware while all this was going on that the very same day coincided with the visit of Chief of Naval Staff and a body of Parliamentarians which was to include a "full on" luncheon. It so happened that CNS from his seated position in the Ward Room over lunch caught a glimpse of Lord Nelson's recent aircrew RAAF brevet and then,, to coin a phrase, "all hell broke loose". The offenders admitted their part in the "offence" but quickly indicated there had been no defacement to the oil painting. The Navy reaction was apparently one of blatant effrontery by the RAAF guests and that there would be a discontinuing of such annual visits to Nowra. by the RAAF Staff College.

It was our Course, No 22, six years later that broke the ice again. An invitation was offered and accepted in 1968 with the resumption of Intercollegiate visits but not without very strict briefing from our "Big Daddy" Commandant of the College, Group Captain Hurditch.

Apportioning of time proved to be one of the most significant aspects of our time at the Staff College. Long lead time on some of the Assignments often ended in a frenzy of cramming and scrambling. Strangely this could be alleviated somewhat by frequent recourse to the Golf Course which was a wonderful amenity at RAAF Base Fairbairn. Additionally the Officers' Mess was equipped with a good clay tennis court which was often used for a hitup before breakfast.

Opportunities for Exercises with other Services also presented themselves during the year. One in particular involved the Royal New Zealand Air Force and went under the title of "Fusion Week". The last day of this "Week" included a Buffet Luncheon in the Officers' Mess prior to the "Kiwis" flying back to N.Z in their accompanying Orion aircraft later in the afternoon. Accompanied by a Course mate, Mike Lancaster on the final morning of "Fusion Week" I walked past the Parade Ground en route to the College campus and noted on the yard arm of the Parade Ground flag staff that the RAAF Ensign had been replaced by a rather large and colourful New Zealand Air Force Ensign.. Considering this to be an attempt to "take the Mickey out of us" we discussed over a cup of coffee in the Common Room ways and means to capture the flag as a souvenir of the RNZAF visit!. Sqn Ldr Peter Brown and Ralph Barnes came up with a "Lu Lu". Ralph was the RAAF's Deputy Provost Marshal and had Entree to the Guard Dog enclosure at Fairbairn. They disappeared to cook up some reprisals.. Sure enough as we walked up to the Officers' Mess to attend the luncheon there on the front lawn a flag pole had been erected, hanging from the yard arm was the RNZAF Ensign and chained to the Flag Pole was the angriest Guard Dog to be seen. Suffice to say the RNZAF party departed that afternoon without their Ensign but, and quite seemingly, with their heads low and tails between their legs.

I do hasten to say that there were many occasions during our twelve months at Staff College, when some light banter or other perhaps mischievous behaviour lightened the "load" of what was really a fullon part of our lives in the RAAF. One such occasion was during the visit to Melbourne and in particular No 1 Stores Depot at Tottenham, in the Footscray District. We were attending Group Captain Boucher's Commanding Officer's Cocktail Party convened in our honour. One of our number, the Royal Air Force Exchange officer on our Staff Course, Sqn Ldr Alan Cushman had a habit when having a glass of beer to hold it half emptied behind his back, from whence he would occasionally move it forward to his mouth for a quick sip of the brew. On this occasion he was heavily in discussion with the good Group Captain, (with half a glass of beer perched behind his back), when Sqn Ldr Bill Bannerman quietly emptied half a bag of

potato chips into Alan Cushman's hand behind back mug of ale. Imagine both the surprise of not only the C.O but of poor old Alan also when the glass was brought around for a quiet sip.



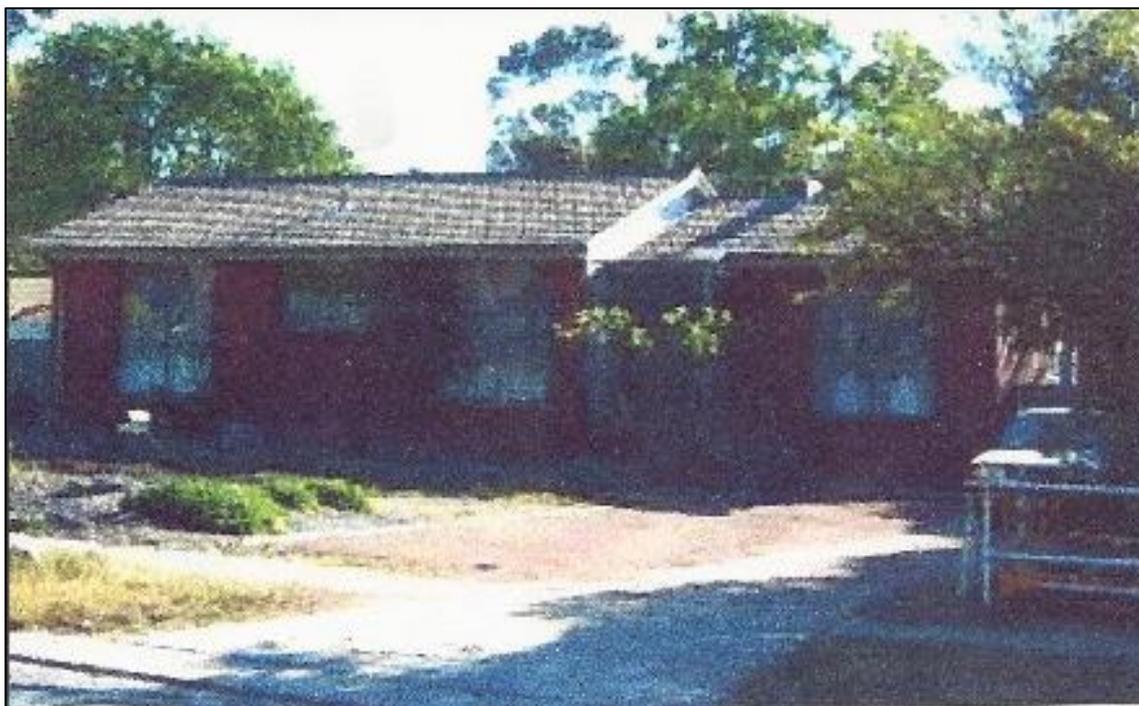
No 22 Staff College Course "First Eleven + 1" (1968) ([Back](#))

Standing LR: Tom Thorpe, Mike Lancaster, Ken Tuckwell, Rex Ramsay, Bill Bannerman, Alan Cushman, Ben Dunne

Front LR: Ernie Brown, Ted Whitehead, Jim Kitchenside, Ted Ilton and Tom Johnston.

Probably one of the biggest challenges for Staff College students was the imperative to create a balance between Course Syllabus time apportionments coupled with domestic/family responsibilities, social needs and the importance of maintaining a required level of fitness for mental stress cushioning/alleviation. A number of us were already in our "Forties", somewhat foreign to a classroom environment and had a need to re-establish a "Study" habit. I have already mentioned the advantages we had with a Golf Course on our doorstep, the tennis court and even as depicted above, opportunities to play the odd game of cricket each of which "fed" the exercise quotient. As to the Social side of things in addition to the Course Programmed Social activities and given that each of us were married and with our families nearby, a Social programme to which the wives could embrace was also effected.

I took on the role of Social Secretary for the latter and endeavoured to arrange a "mixed function" at least once per month. One function which I made brief reference to earlier was a "wine tasting" evening arranged by Owen O'Brien resulting from which was named the most popular wine which then became the Course vintage for No 22 Staff Course.



GOVERNMENT HOUSING CANBERRA LATE 1960'S ([Back](#))

A TYPICAL GOVT HIRING IN WALLER CRES CAMPBELL.

Readers will recall that in earlier pages I went into some detail concerning (Government) Housing in the A.C.T which really began on a large scale with the Defence Department's move from Melbourne to Canberra in the late 1950's. I also mentioned the House that we were allotted in the new Canberra suburb of Campbell. Fortuitously, opportunities were subsequently given, two or three years later, enabling occupiers to purchase on most liberal financing terms the house they had been allotted. I seem to remember that the criteria for such a purchase was that the Tenant had to have rented the property for at least two years. It would be safe to say that there were very few who did not take up this offer. Unfortunately we were not able to with our original house in Campbell as we had only occupied it for twelve months or so before moving to Malaysia. It was our good fortune, when seeking a Canberra rental whilst undergoing the Staff College Course that the house we did rent, (similar to the above), had been purchased under these arrangements by Geoff Michael who had been in the 1959 move. He purchased the house some three or years later. Subsequently, on his posting away from Canberra he was able to have a succession of Staff College students on a 12 month leasing arrangement. Our good fortune with the ACT housing arrangement will, and surprisingly, continue in the next Chapter

Looking back on this rather momentous Staff College aspect of my life I do still regards it as probably the most significant happening in my RAAF career and subsequent evolution. As 1968 drew to a close, so did the climax of our Course and the postings which followed. The very nature of the course prompted our expectations that each of us would be given either a Staff job for our next employment or even a Command appointment. I was not expecting the latter due to the paucity of such appointments for officers of the Administration Branch, however I

was quietly confident that I would be appointed to a Staff Officer position at the RAAF HQ located in the Defence Department's Russell Offices in Canberra.

The last weeks at the College were spent scrambling to complete final Assignments, apprehensive thoughts about whether one was going to graduate with the postnomme initials of "PSC" (proficient at Staff College), the final interview and "Staff College Tie" presentation from the Commandant. I had no illusions about been one of the brightest students on the Course. It had been a battle for me so my final interview was one with some still apprehensive moments. The Command's interview and accompanying Good Wishes were all that I could have hoped for, and even now some 45 years later I still wear the Staff College Tie with pride and a measure of achievement! Also I was quite thrilled with my posting to Air Force Headquarters in Russell Offices for Staff Officer duties in the Personnel Directorate of Officer Postings. The other big "plus" which went with such a posting was the lease of a Government Married Quarter. It was most unlikely that there would be anything available in Campbell as all the housing would already have been purchased by previous Tenants.



Russell Offices and the Lake Burley Griffin locale ([Back](#))

**RAAF H.Q. RUSSELL OFFICES
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE
CANBERRA ACT**

Allocations were now being made in the more distant suburbs of Canberra. We were offered a new house, quite small, out in the Belconnen district. Mattee had in the meantime been working out at the Canberra Grammar School and noted one morning when driving out from our rented house in Campbell a Removal Van outside a house in the next street from us (Glossop Cres). She wondered whether it might be available to rent or better still was it still a Department House?. She gave me the address and I rang the Dept of Interior office where rentals were allocated. Would you believe that this property was still in the Departmental pool and was up for reallocation following some major restoration. I asked whether I could bid for it and the reply was in the Negative, i.e. it would be reallocated before the effective date of my posting which was the 18th December 1968 3 weeks away. Living so close to the address of this house, I

kept a daily eye on things restoration progress etc. The first sign that “work was imminent” was usually a large box of tools being placed on the nature strip of the house to be repaired/restored About ten days later, such a box appeared together with a number of workmen. I called in on the painter workmen present, I was in uniform and my Sqn Ldr rank showing. One of them said “your House Mate, what colour would you like”? I quickly responded “Mushroom throughout would be nice thank you”. I enquired as to when the house would be ready for reallocation they said “2 weeks”. My good fortune continued with this matter, I was able to bring forward my posting to coincide with work complete and successfully applied for allocation of the house



The aerial view of the same offices including a better perspective of the US Eagle Memorial (a.k.a “Bugs Bunny”)

With my posting from Staff College to Air Office at Russell in mid December 1968 we wondered at where the last 12 months had gone!, Among other things Gary had spent his first twelve months as a Boarder at the Kings School in Parramatta. Somehow or other we managed to make at least one trip each month up to Sydney to see Gary and to take him out for the day. Usually a ferry trip over to Manly and then to a movie before heading back to Canberra late Saturday night. Mattee’s health had stabilised, with very few asthma attacks and she was enjoying her role as Secretary to the Bursar at Canberra Grammar School.

The house moving from our temporary home in Waller Crescent to the just around the corner address of 9 Glossop Crescent went quite smoothly and we were able to space it out over a couple of days. New carpets. curtains etc were necessary, the house with its new coat of paint inside and out was soon made to look like home, although small, of monocrete construction. It had three bedrooms a quite large sloping allotment, large gum trees in the back and a neat and easily maintainable garden/lawn area both back and front. It did not have a garage which was a

build after feature of all Government housing in Canberra in those days, not even a carport, but it did have a hard-standing area where a garage would normally be situated. Fortunately, the rear neighbouring house did have a timbered and tin roof garage which was being replaced with a large brick structure. We were able purchase it in disassembled form and re-erect it on our garage hard-standing site. Our good fortune with this house even got better. On making enquiries about possible purchase we found that the earlier twelve months we had spent in Chauvel St Campbell and the more recent twelve months at Staff College met the "two year" residency criteria and we would enable us to purchase the Glossop Cres property which we did at \$34,000.00.



Our Glossop Cres house, as it is today. ([Back](#))

There was little doubt that the pleasure we had enjoyed during our first stint in Canberra and particularly the suburb of Campbell, was again beginning to be something quite special. Everything seemed to be right on our doorstep. I could, and did, walk to work each day. Our daughter Robyn's school was almost on our doorstep, at least for the first year, then for her first year in High School it too was close to home. We had a neighbourhood shopping Centre, we were always welcome at the Officers' Mess at RAAF Fairbairn and we were able to participate in the Mess Social programme. Even our ecclesiastic needs were taken care of following the call of the Curate of St John's Church a few days after the move into our Glossop Cres house. He introduced himself as "I'm Clive King from St John's Campbell Church". I admitted to our being Anglicans and offered an intention to our Curate visitor of becoming Parishioners as soon as things settled down with our move, new job, schooling etc. Also, in the back of my mind, and indeed still, was the common family practice of not only regular Churchgoing but also to have one's children Confirmed. Both of these aspects I aired with our visitor. In the event I became a member of the St John's Vestry, we attended Church most Sundays and Robyn joined St John's Confirmation class regularly conducted by Clive King.

At this time, at age 42, I had been a regular Churchgoer, with a reasonable knowledge of the Confirmation Class practices of two or three score years but quick to admit that Clive King's Classes were the best I had ever seen. Contrary to the usual antiConfirmation Class attitude of participants, St John's was extremely popular. Each Class of six weeks duration ran weekly as an evening function in the Parish Centre and climaxed with indoor sports and an all in trestle food endowed evening meal. Each candidate would bring an assortment of finger food ranging

from sandwiches and all sorts of other “goodies” It seemed to be something of a pity that the rather wonderful camaraderie that evolved during the six weeks did suddenly come to a halt following the actual Confirmation Service.

I talked to Clive King about this with a view to some regular involvement other than the communicants’ attendance at regular Sunday Church Service. Clive too was keen to nourish some regular gettogethers with each group of twelve or so boys and girls. He organised a programme of monthly (Saturday) outings supported by parental transport provision. This entailed a variety of outdoor activities climaxing with a barbecue or other type picnic lunch. We were able to contribute logistic support for these occasions,. We had a big Chevrolet sedan and the appropriate picnic barbq gear. I do remember quite clearly one occasion where we visited a large sheep property down towards Cooma and when eating our lunch I happened to congratulate Clive on his marvellous “pastoral” efforts to which I then quickly added “Clive, with attributes so suited to Military Chaplaincy you would make a wonderful RAAF Chaplain”. Now looking back on this occasion some forty years later, it is quite amazing how prophetic some utterances can become so I take the opportunity at this juncture in the narrative to continue the “Clive King story”!.

The two years we spent in Canberra at this time. 1969/70, we became regular parishioners at St Johns and saw a lot of Clive and also was a Vestryman during the Royal visit of the Queen.

CLIVE KING. [\(Back\)](#)

Now it’s back to the Clive King story and to so do requires jumping ahead to 1971 when I was promoted to Wing Commander and my next posting. Generally, and in the normal course of events, officers who have spent time as a Staff Officer in the Posting Directorate at Air Force HQ can, within reason, select within three locales, their next posting. Naturally the three choices would each contain something special about them. i.e postings overseas or to creme de la creme places such as Amberley or Townsville

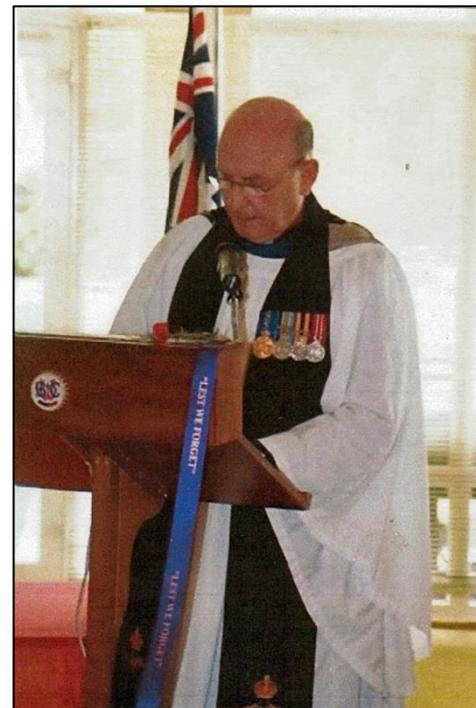


St John's Canberra Royal Visit

In my case I had Butterworth Malaysia as my first choice again, and mainly to stay close to Gary, a second and third choices of Air Command HQ in Penrith or RAAF Base Richmond. The number one criteria for all of this of course is a vacancy occurring at the preferred place. In my case the only three Wing Commander Admin posts vacant at the time of my posting were at East Sale in Victoria, Edinburgh in Adelaide and Pearce in Western Australia. East Sale from a proximity viewpoint became my choice which also now leads to the continuance of the Clive

King story. From memory, in early 1971, I had been at East Sale in my role of CO of the HQ Unit as well as Admin S O for about three months when I received a phone call from Clive King in Canberra to the effect that he had been giving my suggestion re RAAF Chaplaincy a lot of thought and would like to pursue it further with me, particularly the Commissioned Officer “bit” (Chaplains all start at the rank of Flight Lieutenant) and what does belonging to an Officers’ Mess mean? I told him as much as I could on the telephone also that East Sale RAAF aircraft often visited Canberra. I would keep my ear to the ground re the latter and if one comes up, I will come up and arrange a visit to the Officers’ Mess at RAAF Base Fairbairn. ([Back](#))

A week or so later this did occur, I arranged to meet Clive (right) at Fairbairn, we visited the Officers’ Mess, he was my guest for lunch and, as I knew would be the case, he was most impressed. He applied for entry into the Chaplaincy Branch, underwent Officer training at Point Cook and his first posting was to Wagga. He did ask me early in the peace about O’seas postings for Chaplains and I told him that Butterworth was the only place where each major denomination was represented i.e R.C, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist. Jokingly, he also enquired as to how to start the ball rolling. There was a bit of humour / cynicism about this latter query. Taking all activities into account there was quite a number of Overseas posts for RAAF officers in the many different branches and it, although coincidental, was amazing how often soon after a new car was purchased, the purchaser was posted overseas and lost a “mint” with the hurried sale of a newcar.



A few weeks later Clive who had been driving a well-worn “Beetle” for many years, found that a RAAF Chaplain’s pay compared to that of a Curate was quite considerable so he rang me soon after arriving on his posting to Wagga and said “well Ted it worked”!! I said “what do you mean Clive”? He said, “Well I bought a new Valiant just after arriving at Wagga and three weeks later received a posting to Butterworth. And there’s more, now and jumping ahead even further, I was posted back to Butterworth in 1972, met up with Clive, (in fact he was under my administrative Command in the Base Squadron) he retired as Principal Air Chaplain /Air Commodore Clive King which gave some certainty to my testament and prophecy back in 1971 that “he would make a wonderful RAAF Chaplain”.

This was further recognised in 1984 when he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (Military Division). Both Mattee and I were thrilled to be invited to the ceremony of his elevation to Air Commodore Arch Deacon to the RAAF in Canberra 1994

It goes without saying that a rather marvellous friendship developed over the years when we served together in the RAAF and indeed after retirement. Clive accepted our invitation for him to conduct the “Renewal of Vows” at our Golden Wedding on the Gold Coast in 2001. Both Clive and Chris holidayed on the Gold Coast at least once per year at the Rainbow Bay St George’s Guest House and these were very much looked forward to occasions.

On a much sadder occasion, but more than appropriate, Clive conducted Mattee's Tweed Heads funeral service in December 2004 following her long illness from a massive stroke.



*Air Commodore (Chaplain) Clive King AM [\(Back\)](#)
(with Daughter Fiona, Wife Chris and local Bishop, Canberra)*

Having served in the Personnel Branch at HQ level back in the late '50's I found my new job much easier in which to settle, the main difference being looking after "Officer" personnel matters rather than "Other ranks" as in the earlier time. My role was to select postings for officers in the Engineering Branch up to the rank of Air Commodore. The basic thing that prompts postings is the need to fill vacancies, i.e replacements for members leaving the Service, movements due to promotion, training courses, ill health and even deaths!. It was an extremely interesting job requiring the most careful of selection. My opposite number in the

Engineering Branch would work in tandem with me suggesting, on career planning, a list of officers who would be suitable for filling what had prompted the vacancy.

We worked very long hours and had to ensure that “all boxes were ticked” before issuing the Posting instructions. I must say that I did enjoy very much the nature of my job and the cause and effect of my decisions. The most essential part of the selection process of each elective postee was the studying of each nominee’s PP29, ie: his annual confidential report (NB: changes to the “Privacy/Information Act have allowed access to these Reports by the officer being reported on, years after my retirement I obtained copies of all my Service records including PP29, an extract of one of these (1972) is among the epilogue papers at the rear of the book.)

We continued our regular jaunts to Sydney to see Gary and generally enjoyed the Canberra way of life, It was great to have our foot on the Canberra house purchase, particularly as our “money at the Bank” (balance of our house sale in Melbourne ten years' earlier), had been exhausted by medical expenses for Mattee. I had to borrow the deposit for the Glossop Cres house, \$3,500.00, fortunately I was again able to use the War Service Home finance arrangements for Real Estate purchases. I must say that we were thrilled to bits with the chance to again have our own home. We even looked upon it as our likely retirement home. Mattee and I both loved Canberra, although cold in the winter it did have so many things going for it, also the fact that we were still in Campbell was a real plus. A lovely suburb and we did covert the situation.

OFF TO EAST SALE. ([Back](#))

I’ve already heralded our next posting, East Sale. Being an “old Gippsland Boy” and having served in the PMG on secondment to RAAF West Sale (1943) which also occasionally meant a day or two over at East Sale, I knew what to expect Weatherwise, cold in winter, hot in summer and generally I was not overexcited about the posting. As the Administrative Staff Officer, (Admin SO) or CEO/Ex O as is more popularly known in this day and age, I was looking forward to the challenge. Moreover I would be working for the Officer Commanding, a Group Captain Jim Wilson who I had never met but knew quite a good deal about him, “little Jim” as he was called, (about 5 foot.6 on the old scale).

I wrote to him enquiring about Married Quarters. He suggested that I come down and have a look around as to the best thing to do. I had heard that the Base Squadron Commander at East Sale was a Wg Cdr Paul Martin, who had not shifted family from Canberra and travelled back to Canberra from Sale in his car every weekend. I arranged to ride down to East Sale with him on a Sunday afternoon and Jimmy said he would get me on a RAAF aeroplane back to Canberra a day or so later. I had arranged a bed at the Officers’ Mess at East Sale, Jimmy came over and had breakfast with me and indicated that a MQ could be arranged in the one vacant Base house i.e. in one of the wartime buildings which looked like a normal suburban house and which when built in 1943 met the needs of Base camouflage. He then said that this particular MQ had a hole in the roof. The other alternative was one of the Dept of Defence houses that were available in the Sale township.



[\(Back\)](#)

I had a look at the Sale houses and was not impressed due to their smallness. I was keen to look at the “hole in the roof” place and it turned out that Jimmy was “pulling my leg” because he didn't think we would like the unusual interior with, among other things, passage ways like cricket pitches. As to my query about the hole in the roof, Jimmy said that the previous occupant was the RAAF Padre and he had to have direct access to God. So there turned out to be “no hole in the roof” and we took the house which had some strange features none the least of which being no internal heating except for the kitchen electric stove which apparently has also served as winter heating. There were no electricity meters on the house so in the winter at night time the hot plates on the stove would be “cranked up” to keep the house warm (we'd have a gas fire installed in the lounge-room). My new “Boss”, Jimmy Wilson said to me once the M.Q allocation bit was out of the way, “there won't have an aeroplane going to Canberra for a couple days so, if OK with you, I would like to take you into Sale to meet some of the local Business people with whom you will be having day to day P/R moments. Also most of them are Honorary Members of the Officers' Mess and really great people”. I seem to remember that I met the Lord Mayor, the Town Clerk, Sergeant of Police, the Post Master, the Station Master, the Secretary of the Sale Men's Club, the General Manager of Esso (“offshore” Gas Rigs) and even the local B.C.F Boating Camping Fishing man.

The interesting thing about the latter man was his insistence of knowing me quite well from somewhere in the past. I was sure that I had not met him before, certainly not in Gippsland as far as I could recall. His name was John McMillan and a very nice bloke. As we were walking out of the shop I could not help but notice some Tourist brochures on a table just outside his shop. The mystery about having, met, knowing me or whatever, was revealed. It was the photo on the front cover of the brochures and the smiling picture of yours truly proudly holding up the “big” catch!!!

The three of us had a real good laugh and of course I had to relate the story of the picture of me and the beautiful Morwong that I am holding!. I had not seen the picture before but I did remember it being taken back in 1966. We had spent Christmas caravanning at Wallaga Lake, just south of Narooma, with our Melbourne neighbours Lou and Mary Reynolds. Lou was a carpenter and a good boat builder and they used to spend every Christmas at Wallaga Lake with lots of Lake fishing and the occasional sortee out into the ocean. On this particular day we were out in the ocean and as I reeled in the fish Lou took the photo. A year or so later, Lou became involved with the Bermagui Council and their interest in promoting the Tourist activities of the area. He showed them my photo and as they say in the Classics "the rest is now History!!



So back to Canberra for the big move. It was just a week or so away from Christmas and we had to make a trip up to Sydney to Gary's school Speech-night and last day of term. Then back to the more serious business of Christmas preparations and the sorting and packing for the move down to Gippsland. We had toyed with the idea of renting our house to one of the next year's (1970) Staff College Course. In the event our next door neighbour, an RAAF Flt Lt Dick Marshal, had a need for renting a place for his wife's mother. He grabbed the chance for renting our place and now to jump ahead a little bit more, we eventually (in 1976), sold our Canberra house to Dick's mother in-law, but more of that later.

In the meantime we were gearing up for our move, I was indeed looking forward to getting back on to an Air Force Base with the smell of and noise from jet aircraft engines revving for take off. An atmosphere that I had not experienced for some time

[\(Back\)](#)

One of the emotional aspects of life in the Military accompanied with frequent moves from one place to another is the tendency to

reflect on the place being farewelled together with its highs and lows. Both of the place and the people with whom we had been involved. We had developed a strong affection for Canberra and even now as I write this, some forty years later, I look on our time in the National Capitol with fond memories. As to the people, particularly my work mates, sadly many of whom have now left this life they too were great. At this particular time and on the "eve" of my posting to East Sale there was the comforting feature of knowing that these new friendships or renewal of earlier ones could well abound at our new posting, East Sale. I had been particularly fortunate with my Staff Officer relation experiences, both on the original occasion at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne during the 50's where I worked with highly decorated WWII and Korea veterans, Wg Cdr's Bill Briill., Howard Gavin, Jim Lombard, Charles Wakeham, Sqn Ldrs Rod Hanstein, Fred

Barnes and, Des Murphy to name a few. Each of whom were in the mass move to Canberra in 1959.

Then, some ten years later, new faces in my Directorate of Officer Personnel Policy and Administration, Wg Cdr Ray Scott was DPO and my "boss". I worked directly with the then Sqn Ldr Ray Funnell (later to become Chief of the Air Staff) who was a wonderful guide and mentor to me. My immediate workmates were Sqn Ldr's Keith Manning and Keith Clarke. I was also fortunate to have quite a number of my Staff Course buddies in Staff jobs at Russell Offices in Campbell where we all "slaved" to earn that same "King's Shilling" as mentioned earlier on!

I have already alluded to the pleasure and pride that had affected me with regard to my selection for and posting to the RAAF Staff College Course (and not forgetting the personal and uncomfortable differences that had developed between my C.O at Kingswood and me. Well it is safe to say that Staff College events would also lead to some quite remarkable life change events for me, my family and indeed others. The first of these was prompted by the few days our Course spent on the Gold Coast in mid 1968 in between, at the same time, visits to the Jungle Warfare School at Canungra and to No 1 Squadron at the Amberley RAAF Base. I had been to the latter on quite a number of occasions, but never to Canungra or to the Gold Coast. I was extremely impressed with the Gold Coast and had the good fortune to meet up with a former RAAF colleague of mine, Flt Lt Bill Firns, who had retired to Ipswich and had a permanent Caravan site at Palm Beach (right). [\(Back\)](#) I



had been in touch with him just prior to this visit, hoping he might be down on the Coast in his Van and we could "catchup" and this we did. It was great seeing him again and meeting his wife. They both reinforced my high regard for what I was seeing of the Gold Coast and recommending it as a great holiday place. I was quick to relay this to my wife on my return to Canberra and an intention to spend a school holiday time there "sooner rather than later". And sooner it did become when a few weeks later at what was then a popular Canberra event on Sunday i.e: "a Coffee Morning". Keith Clarke invited us to such a morning.

Keith had been on leave and we noted his unusual tanned face, unusual it was in Canberra in winter anyway. He said they had just spent a couple of weeks up on the Gold Coast and had stayed in Noel Peel's holiday house at Tugun. (Noel was a wartime RAAF pilot who stayed on in the Air Force after the War as a Supply Officer and I knew him quite well). I told Keith it was

our intention to spend a holiday on the Gold Coast, hopefully next year. He said casually, "you could do it sooner than that because Noel has told me that his Tugun house is vacant for the imminent September school holidays. I recalled that Staff College was having a week's break for these holidays so I quickly told Mattee who agreed to my making a call to Noel and seeking the hiring of his Tugun Beach house for seven days of the forthcoming School holidays. I rang him there and then and he agreed.

We were working up quite a level of excitement about the prospect of "A week in Paradise" when a week or so beforehand Noel Peel rang to advise us that his fifteen year old son had just suffered a bout of "Apperitanitis" which resulted in urgent major surgery and a recuperative need for a quiet holiday somewhere. Noel quickly continued saying that this could ordinarily be attained by the use of his Tugun beach house if it had not already been let. To this I responded along the lines, "you go ahead Noel and use it, we will get something else" (thinking of Bill Firns and the likelihood that his caravan might be available for our use). The latter was not an alternative as Bill would be using it himself, however, he said he would see what we could find in the Palm Beach area. To our delight he managed to find a vacant three bedroom Unit in Jefferson Lane, Palm Beach right on the beach. We had such a marvellous time we booked it again for the same time next year and every year after except the two years 1972-1974 when we were again up in Butterworth. By this time both Gary and Robyn were doing their own thing and Mattee and I continued this annual "Sea Change" until 1979 when we decided to move permanently to the Gold Coast and purchased a hilltop "Cape Cod: style house in Tugun.

Yes indeed, the Canberra RAAF Staff College experience turned out to be definitely the catalyst for some (great) life changing events. I can even hear Clive and Chris King, our very special St John's Canberra friends saying "We'll drink to that"!!

HISTORY OF RAAF BASE EAST SALE.

RAAF Base East Sale has been a permanent flying training base since its opening on 22 April 1943. A War Cabinet decision was made to relocate No. 1 Operational Training Unit (1 OTU), flying Beaufort light bomber aircraft, from West Sale (No. 3 Bombing & Gunnery School) and No 1 General Reconnaissance Sqn at Bairnsdale and combine the lot at East Sale. With a complement of almost 2,500 personnel, the Base was responsible for training operational aircrew, and was also required to undertake operational sorties around the south eastern corner of Australia. In the main, these sorties were convoy duties and antisubmarine patrols. From its opening until cessation of hostilities, 3,158 Pilots, Navigators, Signallers and Gunners were trained at the base. Almost all of these crews later operated in the Pacific theatre of war. After World War II, RAAF Base East Sale remained, functioning as the main postgraduate flying training base of the RAAF with the activities remaining largely unchanged for over 50 years. To date, more than 20 different types of RAAF aircraft have been based at East Sale. These include Beaufort, Hudson, Ventura, Oxford, Fairey Battle, Kittyhawk, Beaufighter, Ryan ST, Lincoln, Mustang, Dakota, Mosquito, Chipmunk, Vampire, Canberra, Winjeel, Macchi, CT4, and HS748

RAAF Base East Sale, in the 20th century, continues its vital role of training Flying Instructors Air Traffic Control Officers (CFS) Navigators and Air Electronic Officers (SAN), Photographers (School of Photo), and officer Graduates from Officers Training School which moved to East

Sale a few years around 2004. Base Support is also offered by Maintenance Squadron, Base Squadron and HQ RAAF East Sale



Entrance to East Sale today. ([Back](#))

As we drove away from Canberra late on a hot summer afternoon,, I could not help but think back to 30 years earlier, 1943, when as a sixteen year old youth, I was also heading for Sale in Gippsland to start a new job, also to work with the Royal Australian Air Force. Back then I was off to West Sale, not East and this time to be one of the “Heavies” on the Base.



The “Heavies” showing off the RAAF’s new Blue/Gray uniform.

LR: Wg Cdr Ed Plenty (CO CFS), Wg Cdr Brian Graf (CO Mnt Sqn), Gp Capt Jim Wilson (OC RAAF ESL), Wg Cdr Ted Ilton (CO HQ Unit/Admin SO), Wg Cdr Ken McPhan (CO BSQN), Wg Cdr Reg Gillard (CO SAN), Sqn Ldr Greg Crawford (CO Photact).

Apprehension was my mood. Would I enjoy it? What about Mattee and the kids? What am I getting them into? Gary not so bad as he will only need to experience Gippsland during his School holidays, Mattee always readily adjusts, health problems notwithstanding and Robyn seemed to be excited about it all. I hasten to say that there seemed, and most thankfully, an instant "comfort Zone". Then two years later when facing another posting, all four of us were saying what a great time we have had. I hope I can do justice to the East Sale Chapters as I reminisce through years 197172.



The Removalist truck was waiting for us when we arrived at about 8.30 am. It was a really hot morning, our married quarter virtually without insulation was showing us some Gippsland summer temps. The atmosphere did not improve too much the minute the removal van rear door opened, there was a smell that you wouldn't believe, our Removalist, like most of them, had a temporary labourer at the Canberra end and, as it turned out, the smell was traced to his wrapped parcel containing the remains of our cat's raw meat breakfast.

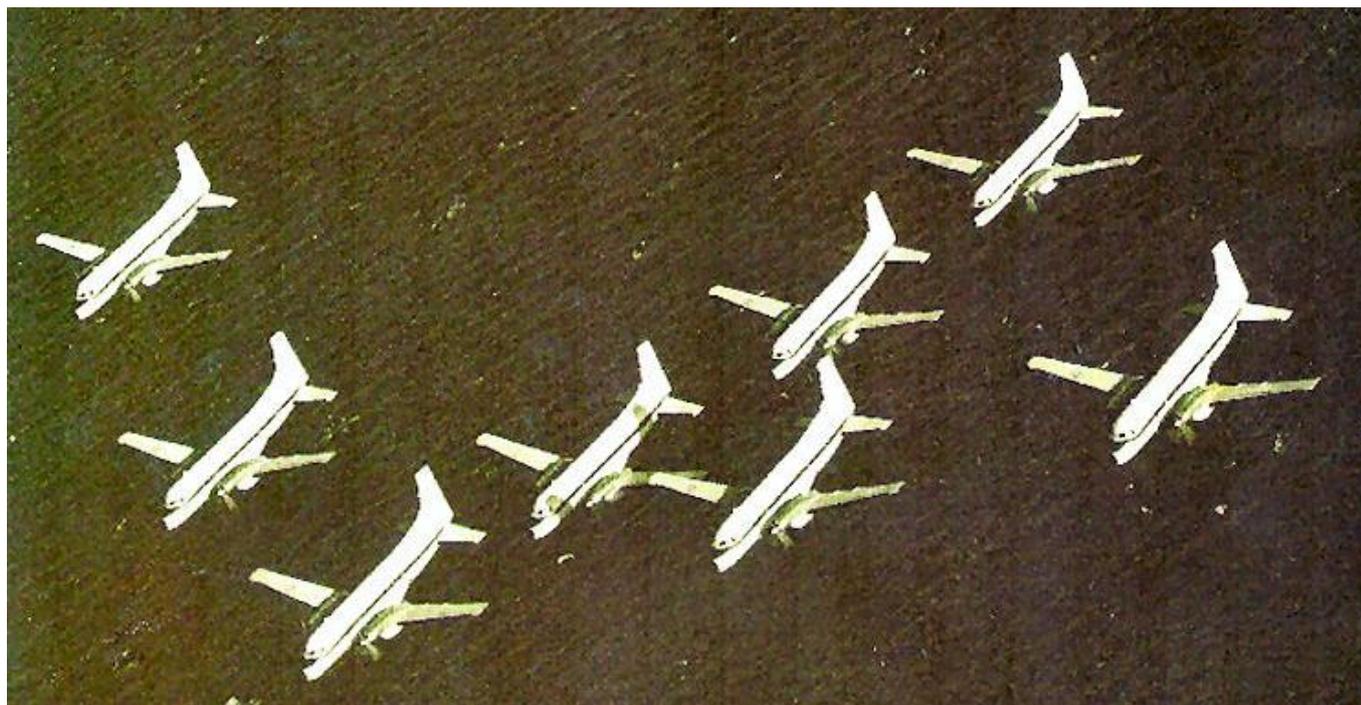
The house was indeed different. As I indicated earlier, most of the buildings on the Base, which had been built in 1941, had the "footprint" of a domestic dwelling. Even the workshops and administrative areas were built to look like houses as well. However, there was no doubt about what the Hangars were and of course a couple of Runways were immediately indicative of the place being an airfield. Oddly enough this did in no way detract from a delightful ambience of lawns, gardens and beautiful old gum trees, the home of some delightful birdlife. There was also an absence of house boundary fences which added to the illusion of a park and/or recreation area. A rebuild programme had started, with the new Officers and Cadet Messes, but the remainder still very much WWII stereotyped structures. You will have noted from the photograph of the "Heavies" there were six Commanding Officers representing the six Units/Squadrons on the Base, each Unit being important and of different shape and size. The smallest was the School of Photography and the largest the School of Air Navigation for training the then Navigators and Air Electronic Officer aircrew categories. Central Flying School provided Flying Instructor training. The large Maintenance Squadron looked after the HS748 Navigator and the Macchi Flying Instructor aircraft.



Gp Capt J.S. Wilson, OC, East Sale. ([Back](#))

The flying of eight HS748's in the air at one time, was a rare sight as cyclic maintenance platforms usually mean that a small percentage of a Squadrons aircraft are usually "grounded" for maintenance, On this occasion they were all serviceable on the one day. I was fortunate to be in the lead aircraft. The OC encouraged me to get airborne when occasions presented themselves and I did quite readily take such opportunities when available

This one was most special.



8 HS748's in the air at the one time.

Given the elapsed time that I had already served in the RAAF (24 years) wherever one went in the Service some already established friendships were present. This was the case too with our newly arrived (1970) presence at East Sale. Among our immediate neighbours were Wg Cdr Ed Plenty C.O CFS, (on my Staff Course in 1968), Wg Cdr Barry Tennant C.O SAN, (Point Cook 1948). Barry, a Navigator was a Graduate of the first post war RAAF College Course (later Academy). I met him when visiting from Laverton 1951. Flt Lt Gary Beck, who was to become OC Flying SAN (Member of No 13 RAAF Academy Course 1963 later Air Vice Marshal).

Each of these members and their families were on hand to greet us on our first day. As too were the OC Gp Capt Jim Wilson and his wife Pauline offering social pleasantries and any assistance with the local "married patch" scene. We were soon unpacked and warming to what was a delightful pervading feeling of having become a part of a large happy family. Although having had some "On-Base Married Quarter living at Kingswood, 7 families the situation at East Sale was where we were one of many families both Officers and Other Ranks in the Base Married Quarters. As well as the "built-in" Social life available at the Officers' Mess, the Base was well equipped with recreational facilities. The Picture theatre, 3 screenings a week, was only a five minute walk away, there was also an Olympic size swimming pool for use in the hot summer months. The Sporting facilities included an Oval complex, a Gymnasium and tennis courts. A Canteen was almost a mini "supermarket". In addition to the Base facilities the City of Sale was well equipped with the normal Urban facilities for modern day living. Moreover the convenience and appeal of the proximity and size of the Gippsland Lakes and River systems offered a myriad of aquatic pursuits. Also in the winter snowfields were not that far away. There was even a daily Airline service, JetAir, to Melbourne from either West Sale (the former Wartime RAAF Base) or from Bairnsdale. Gary was able to use this for the first couple of terms of his Kings School however, and regrettably this Service was discontinued due to a lack of local support/use.

I was looking forward to my first day in my new job of Base Senior Administrative Staff Officer and particularly the OC's brief to which he had arranged for first thing Monday morning. I had heard this much of his RAAF Service, a WWII Bomber pilot, Liberators, flew Lincolns in the Malaysian Emergency, had a 2 year USAF exchange flying B47's and CO Base Sqn Edinburgh. The thing that had really interested me was the number of his postings, (four), he'd been at East Sale over a period of eight years in a number of different roles, namely:

1. CFS Flying Instructor's Course,
2. CFI CFS,
3. CO CFS,
4. OC East Sale.

The latter occurred only a month or two before I arrived. I did so much enjoy my "Welcome Brief" with the O.C, he was just as interested in my background as I was in his. He did comment on P.R matters with a cautionary word about considerable Public resentment of the RAAF and their "noisy jet aircraft". He reminded me of our visit to the "Town's People" a week or two ago and now as a followup he is appointing me as the RAAF Base East Sale PRO and the need for some close relations with the local "Gippsland Times" which he would be arranging in a day or so.



Our married Quarters at East Sale. ([Back](#))

During my first week in my new job as Administrative Staff Officer on the East Sale Base I was reminded of some very good "Public Relations" advice, given me from one of my Point Cook "Elders" and "Mentors" Group Captain Mike Cowan and which went something like this :

"Ted, old son, one of these days you might have a Public Relations "war:" due to some of the locals strongly complaining that their chooks are going off the lay, or their cows are going dry and all due to aircraft noise." Evidence of which can usually be found on a Correspondence file titled "Civil/Community Complaints". I suggest the first thing you should do on being posted into a Senior Admin post on a RAAF Base call for the "Civil Complaints" file.

Bearing in mind that the East Sale RAAF Base had four bordering local Govt Council boundaries : Sale, Avon, Maffra and Rosedale, I did call for such a file and, would you believe, it was six inches thick and it did have a constant series of similar complaints about aircraft noise coming from residents in each of the Shires. I discussed this with the O.C who commented that he had not seen this file, (he had only been in the O.C chair for a short time) and asked "did I have any ideas"? I responded with the idea that we invite separately and over a period of several weeks, the President and Secretary of each of the Shires plus seven or eight Councillors from each. We could start off the visits with a briefing on what we do, followed by a "cuppa" then a Bus tour of the Base finishing up on the tarmac with the boarding of a 748 for a local flip over their Shire. Then back for a drink and lunch in the Officers' Mess. Prior to and then on each occasion we give the Gippsland Times a "heads up" and ask them to cover it. The OC said "let's do it Ted".

The programme was implemented. with each Shire over a four week period having a ten person acceptance. The "Gippsland Times" did give each visit full coverage. It may have been coincidental but shortly after, the complaint letters ceased and Council Executives became "behind the scene" honorary PR reps for the RAAF!!



As I mentioned a page or two back, the OC had encouraged me to "go flying" when opportunities presented themselves and of course, at convenient times. He added this indicates your interest in the daily flying operations of the Base. My continued keenness to get airborne prompted me to roundup the appropriate flying gear, flying suits, flight jacket and warm sox, and "bone dome" when required (for the Macchi not the normal practice for HS748's). The hanging of this gear in my office, coupled with photos of aircraft of East Sale base also demonstrated this interest, (remembering my similar philosophy with the Sabre over the Melbourne Cricket Ground when in Malaysia). The other aspect associated with this interest was to gain a "hands on" feel for what the Aircrew and their Trainees did "in the air". Those nonaircrew personnel that showed a similar interest, but only when it involved a "jolly" (Flights to New Zealand, Norfolk Island etc) indicated an ulterior motive. I illustrate with this point about motives when specifying that most of my flights when at East Sale were on lengthy, five/six hour night "NavExes" in 748's, very little to see outside the aeroplane but lots of interesting activities with the trainees in the aeroplane.

As to this "Jolly" bit, I did break a "rule" during the widespread 50th Year RAAF Anniversary celebrations when, during 1971, each RAAF Base had a Flying Display and our Aircraft i.e HS748's from SAN and Macchis (the "Roulettes") from CFS were involved in each one. The OC gave me the "Green Flight" to take part in the Visit involved to each Base, which I managed, in the 'jump-seat" of the HS748 being flown by Flt Lt Gary Beck. This was an absolute tremendous opportunity which also allowed me to capture most of it on "Super8mm" film.



Photograph by Darren Crick, 2003.

An RAAF Hawker Siddeley 748 as used by SAN for Nav and AEO Training

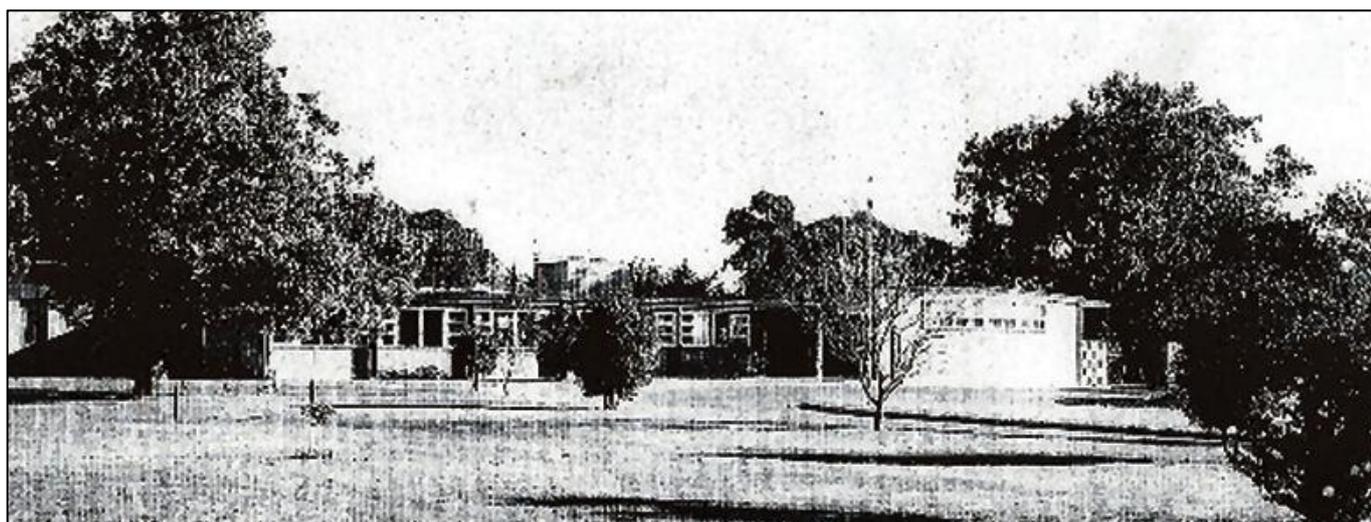
There were many highlights for me during these wonderful RAAF Golden Anniversary celebrations. I could not help the frequent nostalgic RAAF reflections that engulfed me, given I was born at Laverton and that the RAAF was “born” only six years earlier at Point Cook. The other feature of the year was the incredibly high professionalism emanating from the RAAF “on show”. Having had at that time spent twenty years of my service in Training establishments, realisation came to me even stronger that skills were the product of training. This was still very much the case during my posting period at East Sale. As the Base was a Training Command establishment as with Point Cook and Frognall, the upper echelon of Administration and general guidance was always readily available from the helpful personnel staff at Headquarters Training Command down at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne.

In particular our direct link to that Headquarters at Senior Staff level was one Group Captain Jim Flemming AO DFC. If there were the occasional times prompting a “jump” they would be deserved and given. (As I write this portion of this book August 2013 Jim Flemming and I are still in regular I/T contact and have had our **OBE** (“over bloody eighty”) changed to **NBN** (“nearly bloody ninety”). Another and indeed major syllabus “Training” characteristic at East Sale, Point Cook, Frognall, Wagga and other Training establishments with lengthy Course Syllabi was the Graduation Parade festooned with all the traditional “Pomp and Ceremony” compile with a Distinguished Reviewing Officer and the RAAF Central Band. East Sale usually had two of these per year, Wings Parade for both the SAN aircrew Courses, Navigator and A.E.O.

As I am at the stage in these writings to mention something about the East Sale Officers’ Mess I thought it might first be useful to refresh memories of life in the “Mess” for all the exRAAF members of my time, and perhaps those who have come along since?. Also I hasten to mention that in the nearly forty years that have gone since I retired, some, or even many, of the Customs about which I am about to give discourse may be “old hat” now anyway!, Also I mention now the inconsistencies that can occur and which one can fall foul with regard to the equivalent “civvy” dress to that of Service Dress at the particular time of day. My first appearance in the East Sale Officers’ Mess was the afternoon I arrived. I went up to the Mess about 4.30 p.m. to get some cigarettes. I was dressed in “Civvies” tailored slacks, short sleeved sports shirt with collar and of course shoes and sox, the absolute, as I thought,

equivalent to Service Dress of the day. Wg Cdr Barry Tennant who as mentioned earlier was a good mate of mine but who I had not met for some time was the President of the Mess Committee, (PMC) at East Sale. At the time, the Courtesy Rule required the paying of Compliments to the PMC if present in the Mess.

I was to do this on two counts, protocol and my pleasure in greeting him again. He shook my hand with obvious pleasure then took me quietly aside to tell me that I was incorrectly dressed. He was dressed exactly the same fashion as myself but in RAAF Service Summer Dress which included a short sleeved shirt. The Officers' Mess civilian equivalent in the Mess at East Sale required a long sleeved and collared shirt. I was a little perplexed and shamefaced, however, I did admire Barry for his commitment to correct attire and felt a little disheartened and chastened.



At the same time I respected his desire for the maintenance of standards as promulgated and perhaps should have enquired or read. It certainly was not as restrictive at Point Cook, at Kingswood or Laverton, however, it does make the point that I concur with now and, indeed then, always and, if timely, check the Rule beforehand, furthermore if there is some confusion then change the Rule providing it does not lessen the original intention of the Rule. The worry about equivalent civilian attire at that time was doubtlessly prompted by the fact that some short sleeved shirts (1971) were too flamboyant and did not meet Officers' Mess standards. I did have an opportunity some months later having been appointed by the O.C to be PMC on Barry Tennant's posting from East Sale when we had this Rule changed to define that civilian shortsleeved shirts were to be of a conservative nature. The actual provision of Messes in Service establishments grew up as a direct result of the rank structures where for military disciplinary purposes familiarity had to be kept in balance. The common way of doing this is to have three separate Messes, Officers for all Commissioned Officers (or Civilian equivalents), Sergeant's for all Senior NCO;s Sgts to W.Off (or Civilian equivalents) and Airmen (Corporals and below). In addition to these basic criteria wherein the main facilities i.e buildings, fittings, furniture and foodstuffs are provided at Public expense, Officers and Sergeants Messes have Committees of Management responsible for monthly Mess fees subscribed to Mess Members for supplementary foodstuffs, libraries, beverages and Social programme expenses.

There would be I am sure, little or no argument from any ex RAAF officers of my day of what is a most appropriate definition of an Officers' Mess and as attributed to a Group Captain

Stradling RAF: “an Officers’ Mess is the Home of the living in officer, the Club of the Living Out officer and the Social Centre of an Air Force Base”. In an earlier part of this book where I discourse on the 1959 Exodus of the Defence Department from Melbourne to Canberra I do allude to another most important factor of Officers’ Messes also being viz. “the spawning” grounds of future RAAF Policy” (aided and abetted over the odd glass of foaming ale).

All of the foregoing aspects were to be found in the East Sale Officers’ Mess depicted on the previous page. Most afternoons and almost immediately after Stand down for the day the repairing to the Mess for an hour or so was common place, leading the way by those officers living in Married Quarters on the Base. Not because of avoidance of “Breatherlisers” (they had hardly been thought of in the days of which I speak) but more for the camaraderie that was eschewed at the Bar. The Mess was managed by both the “hands on” Messing Staff Cooks and Stewards and the overall management was vested in the Mess Committee, members for whom their employment in this regard is a Secondary duty to their primary role. These appointments were PMC, (made by the O.C), Deputy PMC, Mess Secretary. Treasurer, Bar officer, Messing member, and Entertainments member. In the late 50’s early 60’s the role of the Mess Secretary developed into a virtual fulltime position which resulted in an Establishment policy change providing for Fulltime Mess Secretary/Manager on all major RAAF Bases (this Policy may have come about over a convivial glass at the bar of an Officers’ Mess).

The more popular occasions in an Officers’ Mess were the mixed Dining In Nights the “mixed” being wives and girlfriends as well as Honorary members. The latter generally included Honorary members and partners (as with Kingswood!) of which at East Sale we had a considerable number. The other interesting demographic at Sale in the 60’s and 70’s was its becoming almost an “Oil Town” with the presence of Esso and their oilrigs out in Bass Strait. Senior executive figures of Esso became leading members of the Sale community quite a number of whom were given Honorary membership of the Officers’ Mess. One such member was a Mr John Ross, an ex-Army Major and rotary wing pilot, who headed three or four Hueys which would go backwards and forwards each day with both Rig employees and supplies. He also became a valued part of RAAF East Sale’s Search and Rescue capability.



“The Baron of Beef” Team September 1971 ([Back](#))

*Officers’ Mess RAAF Base East Sale
Flt Lt Vautier (Catering Officer), F Sgt Vickers (Senior Chef), Wg Cdr Ted Ilton P.M.C*

I became a member of the Sale Rotary Club in which the Esso team provided quite a few members of their many different areas of employment. They were great supporters of the Officers' Mess social scene. I remember of one occasion when I was PMC I organised a Baron of Beef mixed Dining In Night which almost blew the Esso people away. The Catering Officer Flt Lt Mick Vautier and I decided the senior Chef should be dressed as a Yeoman Beefeater to which he agreed provided both Mick and I did the same. We then agreed to this and managed to hire the appropriate gear from J,C Williamson at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne. We had a wonderful night of beautiful Australian beef and wines coupled with the great bon homie of all of those attending.

The regalia does remind me of perhaps some of the more modern Military regalia and which these days is usually confined to Graduation parades some details of which I have already mentioned concerning Frognall and also Point Cook. Now I can add East Sale to the list where there were at least two such Parades held each year both being for "Wings Presentation" as well as high academic awards to the Navigator and Air Electronic Officer graduates. Often they included a Trooping of the Queens Colour and generally with the RAAF Central Bank providing appropriate martial refrains. As with the Point Cook occasions the reviewing Officer was also from vice Regal or senior RAAF officer patronage. These occasions required a considerable amount of practice by the Graduating Course, the Support party and the flyover of a formation of HS748 aircraft during the March past. As Base Public Relations Officer these "feet stomping" military activities were great occasions for exhibiting RAAF East Sale's nature and purpose. I used to manage these matters with appropriate pre-occasion packages to the Gippsland Times as well as the RAAF News P.R people. Additionally the use of a well-kept and appropriate Guest List was always an important ingredient for not only those entitled but also for good balance.

In addition to the "stomping of feet" for Ceremonial occasions there was each working morning a farless ceremonial air that marked it as a daily occurrence of all Base personnel. Also conducted on the main Parade Ground, it was designed to facilitate morning roll calls by the Commander of each Flight. Daily Routine Orders (DRO's) would be read out by the Adjutant and was followed by the Orderly Officer's raising of the RAAF Ensign assisted by the Orderly Sergeant. On completion, the Parade would march off to their various breakoff points around the Working areas of the Base. There were other occasions when practises would be held for a "Wings" Graduation Parade when the OC would act in the part of a Sword carrying Reviewing Officer.



As each day went by with our new experiences at RAAF East Sale I couldn't help but note how wrong I had been in not selecting this place as a high on the list Posting preference. If driving from Sale to Bairnsdale which is almost a direct line from the Base, one would think how unattractive is this flat and almost treeless country side. East Sale must surely be the same. But to the contrary, yes, it is flat, the airfield of course is treeless but the Base itself, as I have noted earlier has some beautiful gum trees, and a wonderful mixture of birdlife, magpies, parrots, galahs, wag tails, and kookaburra

To be back again on a flying Base was rather marvellous although when in the Mess after a day's work I tended to feel like an old man at my age, 43, mainly due to looking at the young

faces of the pilots with no apparent signs of even starting to shave. This comparison was even more marked when you hopped into the back of a HS748 to go for a “flip” and you also noted that the fella sitting up in the left hand seat of the Flight Deck had the same young face. In some cases he was young, barely twenty years old and already a Captain in the left hand seat of a twin engined aeroplane. They would come straight from Pearce over in the West with their brand new Pilot’s brevet still throbbing on their chest and seemingly in no time at all (maybe four or five months?) they would be doing a checkout for Captain and would have a maturity look of some one more experienced. I flew quite a lot of night “Nav Exes” with these young men who were “at the helm” and who impressed me with efficiency and maturity. This no doubt attributable to their training when flying Second pilot to the more senior and experienced and whose example they needed to mirror. I think of this now and a rather remarkable incident which it was indeed. The main reason I think of it and relate it to the story is the elements of “example setting” for ensuing efficiency and good order to prevail.

The incident involved the O.C Flying at S.A.N, a Sqn Ldr who for the purposes of anonymity shall be nameless. His 2nd pilot was also one of the middle and more experienced SAN pilots

I felt saddened for Flt Lt Gary Beck who had just been promoted to Sqn Ldr and was about to become the new OC flying at SAN. He would have been appalled at this display of unauthorised HS748 aerobatics and low flying, in particular the serious breach of SOP’s were unforgiveable. The School’s most senior pilot had been advised a few weeks earlier of a staff officer job of “Flying a Desk” at Vic Barracks in Melbourne. It was to be his first desk job after 10 years of all sorts of flying. It seems that he was determined to leave his last flying job with a “bang”. So here we go with the story.

I was sitting in my office on this beautiful cloudless blue sky Spring morning when I noticed a Naval Officer climb out of a car in the HQ carpark, the interesting part was his being a US Navy Commander and who was not expected. The O.C Jimmy Wilson was away at Nowra R.A.N Naval Air Station doing some AJSAS Refresher training and he had left no word with me about US Navy officers intentions to visit. He came straight into my office and introduced himself as the US Naval Attaché visiting from Canberra (I seem to remember an unwritten unspoken Rule where Attaches tend to make “surprise” visits to the various Attaché visiting places on their books. The next thing I heard was the howling sound of HS748 engines but howling louder than usual and seeming to be diving we both ran outside to see what was happening. When up went his nose for a real steep climb and then in he went in a slow roll probably about 2000 feet. “God damn” was about all the visiting Commander could say, I was tempted to “muddy the waters” by my saying “it’s nothing really just something we usually put on for visiting U.S Naval Attaches”.

Jimmy not being in his office and the acting O,C Wg Cdr Ken McPhan the CO of Base Sqn was in his office at Base Sqn HQ. the HS748 then did a return Slow Roll followed by a circuit and then a safe landing. The miscreant then offered his reason saying he wanted to go out with a bang. This he certainly did but neglected to consider his example setting and the younger pilots perhaps doing it too some time as a boredom breaker. The errant Sqn Ldr “hotshot” aerobatic pilot was not Court Martialled due to his impeccable record and the completely out of character of his aerial display, instead he was given a Severe Reprimanded by the Air Officer Commanding HQ Training Command Air Vice Marshal K S Hennock. Jimmy Wilson was not amused when he got back from Nowra and made this known at a special briefing of all S.A,N pilots.

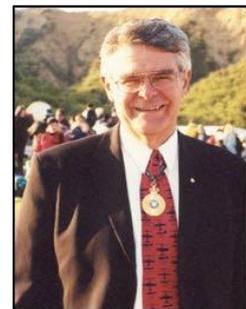
One of my concerns when it was happening was in direct relation to one of these young SAN Pilot Officers who had been given the secondary duty of Library Member of the Officers' Mess Committee and who was extremely Anti-Establishment which tended to show up at my Mess Committee Meetings. The thought crossed my mind that he had lost his stack and was going to wipe out the Control Tower and himself. (Wrong Tram Ted I said being happy to console myself). Another interesting aspect that had happened at the Sale Men's Club a few weeks earlier, when Jimmy and I, as Members of the Club would show the flag there on most Friday nights. On this occasion, one of the members who was a dairy farmer at Longford and on the border of the Ninety Mile beach came up to me and questioned "Ted, what are those two engine aeroplanes doing flying up and down the beach at a reasonably low level and then steeply climbing and rolling over"? As it was early in the evening and he would not have had much to drink, I just assumed that "he wasn't big on aircraft recognition" so I corrected his mistake and said "you are probably watching a couple of the "Roulettes" practising aeros over the beach in their Macchis". He then adopted an air of my having had too much to drink and went back to his other drinking mates, However, there is now no doubt what he was really saying was "it is' what it is". Further queries later established that they had been practising the manoeuvre for some weeks before the actual event. A further revelation is the interest shown by the Hawker Siddley group when they are thought to have said "slow rolling a HS748 is well within safe operating level of this aeroplane". ([Back](#))



The HS748 "aerobatic" incident had barely been "put to rest" when S.A.N's senior pilot Flt Ltr Gary Beck on his promotion to Squadron Leader became the new O.C Flying at SAN. He was obviously "hell-bent" in ensuring that there would be no repeats of his predecessor's bravado and/or transgression on the flight decks of the HS748's!. It was never revealed as to how many were in the know about the prompting of the ill-considered "slow-roll" manoeuvre and, as I mentioned previously, Gary went on to Air rank levels, his most senior position being, with the rank of Air-Vice Marshal, Air Commander Australia. All at East Sale continued to marvel at the high level of airmanship skills being displayed at that time by the CFS "Roulettes" aerobatic team who were on popular demand at various Civil pageantry celebrations, each Display requiring rehearsals in East Sale air space and, more often than not, within the viewing range

of East Sale personnel who happened to be outside at the time

*Air Vice-Marshal Gary Beck
Air Commander Australia 1992-1996*



The daily management of the Base flowed on from each individual training Schools' programmes coupled with the Base services of the Base Squadron and the engineering support of the Maintenance Squadron . What surely was the catalyst for performance would have been attributed to the Officer Commanding's weekly Monday morning conference in his office and attended by each of the C.O's, i.e. Base Squadron Wing Commander Ken McPhan, Maintenance Squadron Wg Cdr Tony Dietz, Central Flying School Wg Cdr Ed Plenty, School of Air Navigation Wg Cdr Barry Tennant, School of Photography Sqn Ldr Bill Riggs and myself with the dual appointment Admin Staff Officer and C.O of the Formation Headquarters Unit. These weekly conferences were a quite wonderful administration tool. The O.C's Secretary recorded the Minutes, a transcript of which was distributed to each of the Office Bearers the following day . As well as this weekly meeting of the Base C.O's (Managers) - it was also customary at that time for the C.O's being seated together at a Round-Table set-aside for that purpose in the Officers Mess each lunch-time. This same table would be used for V.I.P diners who from time to time visited the Base. It goes without saying that there would have been few occasions when this forum would not have provided opportunities for useful "shop" talk with as many "off the cuff" solutions or following "courses of action", or even "catching-up with the flow" of current topics or other useful information. In this latter regard I do remember quite clearly at one of my earlier lunches in the East Sale Officers Mess when the topic of local fish being caught was discussed . On hearing Bill Riggs speak of a breed of "Spotted Mullet" amongst those being caught and of which I had never heard and moreover as a "new chum" I did not want to show my ignorance of such a breed, so I carefully waited until after lunch when I would question Bill's fish nomenclature - particularly Mullet of which I felt there was no such breed as a "spotted" variety. Bill, when questioned, gave a wry smile and told me that it was a precautionary name given by a local Lake netting fisherman when disposing of rainbow trout when netted in the lake and whose distribution had all sorts of Rules /Regulations concerning their disposal.



The sometimes called "Spotted Mullet" ([Back](#))

While on the subject of things "Fish" and like so many other things seemingly central to the general East Gippsland district, the locale in which the RAAf Base at East Sale is conveniently located, a variety of angling activities presented themselves. Bill Riggs and Tony Dietz introduced me to off-the-beach Salmon fishing from the Longford end of the 90 mile beach where we often angled for the nice-span-sized Salmon which were great sport. Alternatively to

this was fishing from bank of the Mitchell River for Flathead and Bream or by boat which could then lead to an innumerable number of boat fishing sites either in any of three lakes or two rivers which ran into them. I was fortunate enough with the latter as arranged by our Sale Rotary Club, when with a number of relatively large (8 to 10 people) launches we spent three nights on the water fishing each day during the daylight hours mainly for Bream. Then on another occasion, with my then 80 year old Dad, his 75 year old brother Claude and my 16 year old son Gary we spent a week-end on a Bulls Cruiser out from Metung and had a rather wonderful time. I was also fortunate enough to have an on-the-Base neighbor Flt Lt Bob Lambell - who owned an "Endeavour 26" sailboat moored down at the Metung Yacht Club and which I often learned and helped sail on many a Sunday during the sailing season .

I realise here that I haven't mentioned the fate of the beautiful Dodge that we had brought home from Malaysia in 1963. We did in fact continue to drive it until 1967 when it was upgraded in Sydney to a 1962 Chev Bel Air. We had become accustomed to the "large Yank tank" variety of motor car and the Chev was about the same size as the Dodge. It had low mileage and had been given lots of Love and Care by its previous owner. Unfortunately, in 1971, it developed a fuel pump and carburettor problem which made it unreliable when an Ad in the Age caught our eye, "Pontiac Parisiane" pillarless, 1966, ex Funeral Director's car, for sale at Dandenong. We looked at it and bought it, the Chev was part of the exchange.

**1966 Pontiac - Pillarless Sedan
at RAAF East Sale 1971 [\(Back\)](#)**



A common happening on all RAAF Bases was the annual visit of the Air Officer Commanding when everything needed to be in "Inspection Order". Depending on the size of a particular

Base such visits could last for two days - invariably a one-night stay was involved with a formal Dining-In-Night being scheduled to honour the AOC. During my two years at East Sale I was involved in two AOC visits, the senior officer concerned was the same on both occasions, Air Vice-Marshal K S Hennock, CBE AFC Air Officer Commanding Support Command. It was not unusual for such visitors to have a "bug" about something, advance notice of this usually being available from the previous Base that the AOC had visited. Our visitor had been to the RAAF Base at Edinburgh in South Australia the previous week. I had made a quick telephone call to my opposite number at Edinburgh and learned that the "bug" of the month was Pillows with lumps like "golf balls" contained therein. Apparently the Edinburgh team has learned a day or two prior to the AOC's visit that he had a pet hate about RAAF pillows. Apparently there had been a recent upgrade of these items and his Edinburgh hosts had been aware of this matter and managed to get some of the new stock into their Mess bed-rooms a day or two before the AOC arrived. The other "hate" that he had was not having the latest Newspaper available to read with his pre-breakfast "cuppa". I alerted the Senior Equipment Officer as to the need for acquiring these "new Model" pillows and the latest newspaper to be delivered to his bed-room for his awaking moments.

Although both the OC and I lived on the Base and did not normally have breakfast in the Officers Mess, occasions such as these “demanded” that both he as OC and me as PMC should accompany the AVM at breakfast. We met him at the door into the Mess at 0730, the body language of “His Airship” signalled some problems which quickly emerged following the “Good Morning Sir, we trust that you slept well?”. “Like bloody hell did I sleep well, with golf balls in my pillow “ and to add to this short-coming “also I had already read the delivered paper yesterday morning in Melbourne”. A quick check after we had eaten breakfast revealed that the new pillows had not arrived and the paper was yesterday’s “The Australian” which certainly was the “most recent” as far as the Mess Warrant Officer was concerned as he exhorted to me - “Sir, *The Australian* arrives in Sale mid-afternoon on the day of circulation and therefore was the most recent” !!.. Thank goodness that these were the only hitches during the AOC’s visit and he did leave us with a “well done Chaps”!.

This latter comment was followed-up in his written de-brief some month later which also proved to be a harbinger for the award of the “Best Base” Hawker Siddeley Trophy being given to RAAF Base East Sale the following year. I hasten to say that this Award covered the period that Group Captain Jim Wilson was Officer Commanding and I was Admin Staff Officer at RAAF base East Sale. Winning this trophy was a credit to all concerned at East Sale and I would have enjoyed being present for the Parade and the accompanying Presentation ceremony, however, by this time both Jimmy and I had been posted, he to be Assistant Commandant of the RAAF Academy at Point Cook and I to RAAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia again to be an Administrative Staff Officer. Had I received an Invitation I would have endeavoured to use a spare seat on a C130 for the journey there and back. There has never been any doubt in my mind that my two years at East Sale were the happiest and most satisfying times of my thirty years RAAF service as endorsed by the above.



**L-R: Sqn Ldr Greg
Crawfoot, CO Photoscl; Wng
Cdr Reg Gillard, CO SAN;
GpCapt J Wilson, OC; Sqn
Ldr Mark Perrett, CFI CFS;
CAS and Air Marshall
Hancock. ([Back](#))**



L-R: WgCdr Gillard, CO SAN, GpCapt Wilson, welcoming a Department of Air visitor, GpCapt S Nichol.



*1972
L-R: AOC AVM Hennock; GpCapt Wilson; SqnLdr Phil Dunne. AVM Hennock takes the opportunity for a "flip" in a Macchi.*

I have already once or twice mentioned “The Gippsland Times” and its connection with one of my Secondary appointments on the East Sale Base. i.e Base Public Relations Officer. Having made entrée with the Editor, Milton Lewis, in company with the OC during my prearrival tour getting to know the Who’s Who of the area. His interest in the Base was an almost daily one. He would ring me and I would ring him, he was akin to the Alan Jones of the Radio News area, later TV as well. It was great to have a virtual “Open Sesame” button with Milton as generally his coverage of Base events were given initial leverage from suggestions of mine given to him or to his Chief of Staff, either in writing if time permitted, or by telephone.

When I left East Sale in 1972, I was presented with a book of Gippsland Times clippings and photos. Unfortunately, it was lost in a garage flood at my apartment in the Gold Coast in 2004. Fortunately, I had copied some of the photos on which I did a “scrap book” with the light-hearted captions from RAAF East Sales 50th Anniversary in 1991 a few of these I have included in as a final feature of this Chapter on East Sale.

I also occasionally had direct contact with the Melbourne press as evidenced by the Age clipping below.



**RAAF BUTTERWORTH RE-VISITED
1972-1974.**

A few weeks before Christmas 1972, I was sitting in my office and was pleasantly surprised to respond to a call from the O.C to “popup” to his office for an early Christmas present and even more surprised when entering his office and he said, “Ted, how would you like to have another posting to Malaysia”?. My response was one similar to that of the one I gave thirty years earlier when my then (Postmaster) boss asked me “how would I like to work with the RAAF at West Sale”?. I gave the same reply about “slices of the Moon”!. Having already had one wonderful posting to Butterworth, to have another was too good to be true. He told me I had been selected for the Senior Administrative Officer appointment in the Base Squadron at Butterworth and the effective date of the posting was 18th December 1972. Almost in the same breath he told me of his posting to Point Cook as the Deputy Commandant of the RAAF Academy at Point Cook. First reactions naturally was its effect on the rest of the family. Gary was only a few weeks from graduation at the Kings School and was hoping to enter the RAAF in 1973 and Robyn was about to move into High School in the New Year. My wife Mattee, who had so enjoyed our previous stint in Malaysia shared my delight. Also we were fairly confident that the chronic nature of her asthma would probably look upon the salving nature of a tropical climate as compared with the “ill-winds” of the Southern Hemisphere. Knowing what was involved with such a posting as on the last occasion, we were able to quickly “list” what we would need to take amongst our chattels and clothing and the rest would then go into storage. Our main concern was the need to sell our Pontiac and the practicalities of Robyn being able to begin her Secondary Schooling in Malaysia by correspondence. Knowing Gary’s decision to join the RAAF was another consideration but unsure of timings involved, we agreed that we should proceed to Malaysia as a family, spend Christmas together and sort out these other aspects early in the New Year.

Qantas First Class upper deck. ([Back](#))

What had changed since our previous posting to Malaysia was the means of travel which formerly had been by sea but now had now changed to air travel and with Qantas as the Carrier. We were quite excited about the prospect of flying First Class in a Qantas Jumbo Jet. It was also nice to have quite a large contingent of “Rellies”, armed with Xmas presents, to see us off with the accompanying good “Good Lucks” and “bon voyage’s” !!.

Our last few weeks at East Sale had been busy ones, not only with sorting and packing but also attending a number of farewell parties we had among the many RAAF and civilian friends with whom it had been our good fortune to mix with during the past two years. The sale of the Pontiac had not been without its problems but eventually was sold during out last week. Another problem involved the International Health Certificate that was in vogue at that time certifying that we had received the necessary injections and vaccinations for entry into Malaysia. The major hitch arose with Mattee’s Cortisone medication not being compatible with the mandatory vaccination Serum and which we needed to take to ensure ease of entry to Malaysia when disembarking in Singapore. Our previous tour in Malaysia had conditioned us to the “Red Tape” syndrome that plagued the Malaysian Civil Service and no doubt, due to the teachings of their Colonial Masters, the Brits, who were also renowned for their “Red Tape” pre-occupation-ness. Fortunately we still had our Health Certificate Booklet that we had used when previously travelling to and from Malaysia where-in on one of the pages was a Certification for the Smallpox vaccination. The RAAF Medical Officer at East Sale had to sign the various “Certifications”. In the Smallpox Certification it read *“this is to Certify that a Small-Pox Vaccination was administered to Mrs M M Ilton on 16th July 1959 - (twelve years earlier).*

I was confident that the Malaysian Immigration Officials would only be interested in the Doctor’s signature and date of Certification!. In the event we passed through the Immigration Screening queue at Changi airport without any hitches. Now back to our pre-departures in Australia. We travelled by train to Melbourne and spent a couple of “unwinding” days in an Albert Park Motel. As on the former occasion the RAAF Movements people were most efficient meeting us at Flinders Street station in Melbourne, taking us to our Motel and then to the airport at Tullamarine on 17th December. Being First Class passengers we, and our Rellies had entree to “The Captains Lounge” which was rather nice, delightful “snacks” and drinks of all kinds. Then on the announcing of “All Aboard”, the Purser of the Jumbo escorted us to our seats in the front of the aircraft which were spacious and extremely comfortable. Robyn had occasion to be even more excited when noting that Sir Robert Helpman of Ballet fame, was in the seat in front of her. However, and as we later found when landing in Sydney on our way North we were actually on the tail-end of a London-Sydney Qantas Flight and the Sir Robert H dis-embarked in Sydney, ([Back](#))



There was a crew change and a re-fuel, following which we took off for Darwin then direct to Singapore. We kept “ohhing” and “Aaaarrrrring” for our entire journey concerning the comfort, facilities and cabin service of a Jumbo jet. The configuration of an upper deck-lounge for First Class passengers was something else again and we spent most of the time up there “wallowing” in its facilities. We were also fortunate in the attendance of a couple of other RAAF families on board, but not for Butterworth, one family was heading for a posting to Rome, another Wing Commander Supply Officer and his family en route to Paris and the other a Squadron Leader Pilot and family heading for London on exchange posting with the Royal Air Force.

Unlike the previous occasion when arriving in Singapore, we didn't seek train travel for the rest of our journey to Penang but we did stay overnight, not at the “Goodwood Park” hotel this time but the “Hotel Mandarin” which is also situated in the convenient Orchard Road precinct. We had a quick “look-see” around some of our earlier “haunts” and shops. Then the next morning the MCO's continued their task of getting us on the way to our final destination, Penang. We flew there in a Boeing 737 to the Beyan Lepas



([Back](#)) airport in Penang where the RAAF Butterworth Movements people met us and took us to the dear old “E & O Hotel “ where, upon arrival, we felt as if we had never left it although it was looking a little tired, (it did have a major makeover in the early 2000's but retained its architectural style of the original 1890's). Some of the staff remembered us and we were looking forward to spending a week or two there until our on-Base Married Quarter become available. We knew that we would notice quite a change to the last occasion when we lived in a series of houses on Penang Island and I had the daily ferry ride to and from the RAAF Base. Similarly as to last time, 12 years earlier, we were in the market for a car. Again there were deals as before but not with the “big Yank Tanks” this time. They had gone out of favour with the rich Chinese “Mandarins”, the Mercedes having been their replacement choice but not being annually replaced with a new model so there were little or no “second-hand” bargains of yesteryear. One of the alternatives was to purchase a new Volvo, priced at nearly half price of the same car in Australia, but even that was still going to be beyond our choice!

([Back](#))

However, and what turned out to be incredible once again as far as the purchase of a motor vehicle was concerned my “luck” was again in!. As it happened right opposite the E & O Hotel was “Wearnes's Motors” formerly a retailer for American cars and now Mercedes and Volvo. Out of curiosity on our first day, Gary and I called in to Wearne's to at least discuss our car-purchase “problem” with a



motor car Salesman! Gary said to me “what’s that black car over in the corner Dad, looks a bit like a “Rolls”?. It was black, had flat tyres, covered in dust and Gekko excrement, but underneath all that “degradation” it had a silver flag staff on the bottom and I recognized it as a 1966 Humber Super Snipe. A Salesman came over to enquire as to whether we were interested in the “Snipe”. I enquired about its history and was told that it belonged to the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and was usually replaced with another Humber every three or four years. However, as since Humbers have gone out of production the Embassy now uses Mercedes. They have left the Humber with us to sell and are asking \$1,500.00 Malay (about \$500 Aust). He then said he would give it a good wash, pump up the tyres, put in a new battery “and if you come in tomorrow you can take it for a ride”. We accepted his invitation and in the meantime I rang the High Commissioners office in Kuala Lumpur to discuss my interest in the Humber. He said that it needed to be registered and this would add another \$1,500.00 Malay to the price. I advised him that we would be taking it for a run tomorrow with the Wearne’s salesman and if we like it, and if you have it registered I will pay the \$1,500.00. He indicated that a sale on this basis could be a possibility and to ring him again tomorrow. Well the next day dawned, the Humber looked a million bucks and ran like a dream. It had power steering, air conditioning, stereo music, wood (walnut) panelling, pig-skin upholstery and deep piled carpet. Gary and I went driving the next afternoon and felt like the Governor of Penang as we drove the streets of Penang. Our phone call back to K.L and the car was ours.

What turned out to be quite a remarkable thing, was the Officer Commanding the RAAF Base, Air Commodore Peter Raw’s RAAF Staff Car was an identical car to mine and it was surprising the number of salutes I used to get when driving my Humber around the Base. It turned out to be a wonderful motor car, which I shipped home and didn’t sell until I retired from the RAAF in 1976. I actually sold it to a Chicken Shop proprietor in our suburb of Burwood in Melbourne for \$2,500.00.

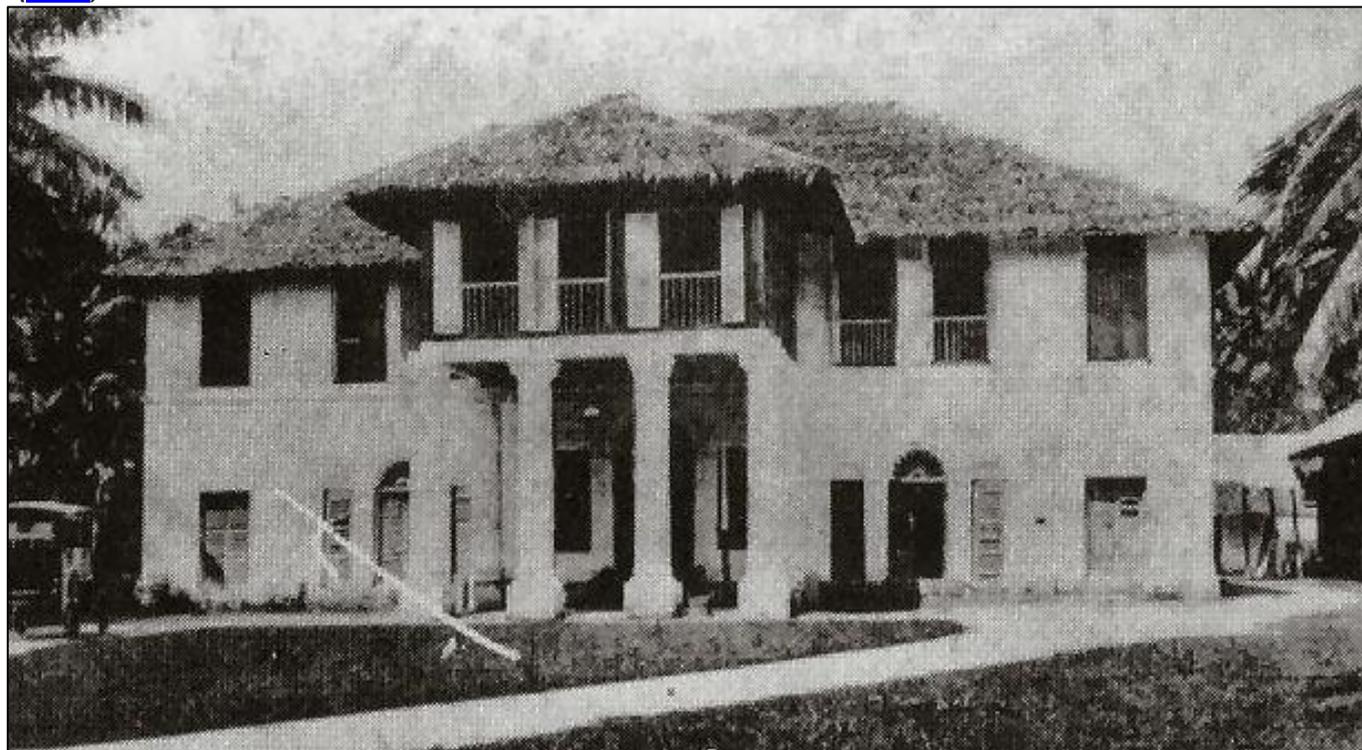
We really could not believe how lucky we were, to finalise a car purchase so quickly, at a price we could afford and a standard of excellence that we never would have thought would be ours. We had some fun with it once we got back to Australia, it accompanied us home on the same ship, this was lucky too because we should have been travelling home by air and the un-accompanied freight, as the car would become, would have been much higher! This is where the Health Certificate matters again “reared a head”. The same Vaccination for Small Pox question would again re-present on our return to Australia where International Health Certification was just as strong on Small Pox vaccinations, without it two weeks quarantine was inescapable for the non-vaccinated. When we were having this problem before leaving Australia I insisted that it be recorded on my documents as it would affect the travel arrangements on return home unless the travel took more than ten days. The latter was occasioned when the Movements people advised that if we returned by air, my wife would be required to go into quarantine for ten days on arrival in Sydney and to avoid this special dispensation will be arranged for our return to Australia by sea “subject to Mrs Ilton not leaving the ship at any time until disembarkation from the ship in Melbourne”.

Another, and quite humorous, story came out of our ownership of the Humber and it concerned the man, Tom Hanks, who purchased it from me. As I have said he ran a chicken shop which I frequented quite regularly and mostly on a Sunday and usually in the Humber. He used to come out of the shop to, would you believe, “caress” it. He knew I had it on the market and as I was retiring from the RAAF and going on a round-the-world-trip he said he would like to buy the Humber. I knew that the market price was about \$1,750.00 Aust but because I’d had a mint-

condition restoration I was asking \$2,500.00. He said he would buy it at that to which I responded I don't like selling used-cars to people I know in case there is a major breakdown soon after the purchase. For this reason I really wanted to avoid selling to him, particularly as some major engine repairs could not be far off. He said he would pay the \$2,500.00 which he did the day we left on our World Trip. Would you believe, six weeks later, Mattee and I were having breakfast in a San Francisco Diner when who should walk in but Tom Hanks and his wife. I said to Mattee "Look who has just come in the door, he has followed us half around the world to tell us that we had sold him a bomb". Thank goodness the car was not mentioned, they were going to England via the States to visit relatives. Some weeks after our return home, Mattee was having her hair done in a shop next door to Tom's. She said to Mattee, "did you sell your Humber to Tom Hanks? well, he sold it a few weeks later to the Humber Society for \$5000.00.

O.K enough of the Humber and back to our new "start" in Malaysia.

We soon felt "at home" in the E&O there had been no major restorations at this time only minor ones so we were quite familiar with all its facilities and Guest information. In fact there were not many changes anywhere, even in the shopping precinct next door to the Hotel. Mattee's dressmaker, Mrs Jones, an actual Indian male, the Mrs "bir" alluded to the owner who was a female. Even my tailor from the first time Wai Chee was still there from the last time, "still have your measurements Tuan" he said when we called in! I had to tell him there had been some changes in waist measurement etc. We realised that with our living on the Base this time that we would not be able to spend the same amount of time in Penang as we did on the first occasion. Certainly if we wanted to do any serious shopping it would have to be over in Penang as shopping centres close to Butterworth were non-existent. Our first run around as a family and in the "new" Humber was to all our previous points of interest, the houses we lived in, the Jesselton "mansion" had been pulled down and a much larger residence was in its place.
[\(Back\)](#)



The Sports Club was still as it used to be except now most of the Members were wealthy Chinese and Indian. We had no intention of joining again as most of our time would be spent on the mainland. We did however join the Penang Club (above) which we used as a “watering hole” when visiting from Butterworth and even stayed there for the occasional week-end.

We also re-joined the Swimming Club which also had changed its membership criteria, most members being non-European. The other rather sad thing was the number of what-used-to-be-mansions - Chinese- that had fallen into a state of decay and complete desertion. It was also rather “warming” the way a large number of the shop keepers, stall holders, and retailers who remembered both Mattee and me. In one instance in the first week we went back to the Pulatekus Fruit and Vegetable Market were Mattee used to shop with our cook Satonah, one stall holder looked up at Mattee as we came past and called out “hello Mem, you been on holidays”? Gary and I had a similar experience a few days later when looking for car “detailers and finishers” who worked on our Dodge ten years earlier. [\(Back\)](#) We found his place and walked in, there he was doing some upholstery, he looked up as soon as he saw us and cried out “ Ilton-la!! Remarkable really !.



It only took us a few days to get over the “we’re back” syndrome. Gary and Robyn had joined up with other RAAF family kids who too were staying in the E and O waiting for their house to be vacated. We even heard of a few trishaw races in the cool evening air [\(Back\)](#)

I had of course by this time taken myself over to the Base to check on my new job with the outgoing Senior AdminO, a Wg Cdr Nick Winter and also to look over my M.Q. I should be able to occupy it after our already arranged seven day hand-over take-over period by which time he would have vacated the house in readiness for our occupancy. The first place we went



to was the Golf Course situated on the Air Base and less than half a km from our M.Q. I could not believe what I saw (I did make some earlier reference to it a page or two ago) what had started out ten or twelve years ago as a golf practice area with three holes was now a nine hole course with 18 tees so allowing rounds of customary 18 holes and competitions that go with it. There had been about six two year rotations of RAAF troops and with each would be keen and innovative golfers who had added/improved both the Golf Course and its Club House and Caddy Shack. The Club House was equipped with the usual facilities, toilets, showers, eatery and Bar. The Social evenings, on Saturday evenings after the comp of the day were extremely well attended.

As well as the normal Club programme a reciprocal Golf Club visit programme had been established and of particular note was the Royal Kedah Golf Club, on the Thai border, the home of the former Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman and the Sultan of Kedah whose son Rachid was a boarder at Gary's Kings School at Parramatta. I had the pleasure of having lunch with the Sultan during a visit of our



RAAF Butterworth Golf Club to theirs. He told us during lunch ([Back](#)) that the golf course had been cut out of an old rubber plantation and when completed was gifted to the Tunku as a retirement gift. I mentioned Nick Winter earlier whose job in Base Squadron I was taking over. I will get a step or two ahead of this on account of the fact that I only spent a few months in this job when they posted me again, this time two or three hundred yards up the road to HQ RAAF Butterworth where I would replace "Tour Expired" Wg Cdr Gordon Hughes the HQ position being Administrative Staff Officer.

I mention this at this point because the H/O-T/O that I had with Nick Winter and the Base Squadron job was a sinecure compared with the duties of the Admin S O at HQ. The latter fact came to mind nearly two years later when I also was "Tour Expired" and Wg Cdr Keith Manning was posted in to replace me. However, he was delayed with family ill-ness and I would not be there for the "Hand-over" from me to him. It was for this reason that I put together a written "Brief" to assist Keith with the "Job Description" as well as many details as I thought would be useful for the settling-in-period as well as Reference points for day-to-day Management. I also recall in a chapter or two ago in this book where I wrote about my time in Malaysia in the early '60's and also described our functioning as a RAAF Base at Butterworth but little other detail. Well, I have just re-read my "Brief", dated 24 October 1974, to Keith Manning and realize it contains a wealth of information about the RAAF's presence at Butterworth i. e the personalities involved and their role as well as the 1970 take-over of the Base by the Royal Malaysian Air Force - *(we remained as a Lodger Unit at the same strength and in the same role for most of the 70's followed by a gradual diminishing rate in the '80's)*. So, for reasons of perceptivity, I have inserted the 20 page "Brief" at the end of the Epilogue. It might even be advantageous to have a quick "peek" at this point thus allowing for a better understanding of the complexity of the RAAF Butterworth complexity? (Click [HERE](#)). ([Back](#))



Now, back to things H.O/T.O. On my first morning at the Base I met, and for the first time, the Commanding Officer of Base Squadron, Group Captain "Snow" Joske (right, and known by most as "The Owner") Indeed a thorough gentleman, who unfortunately was almost on the eve of his "Tour Expiration" and return to Australia, his replacement Group Captain David

Smythe was a Navigator and whom I had never met. Our next call was the courtesy of meeting and paying my compliments to the O.C of the Base, Air Cdre P.F Raw DSO. DFC. AFC. I found this to be something of a real privilege to be serving with such a highly decorated RAAF airmen!. Readers might recall that he along with Air Cdre Gel Cumming had flown the second RAAF Canberra in the England to Australia Air Race back in 1953. He and his wife Helen had quickly garnered a quite magnificent reputation as the genial hosts of the “Married Patch”. Next were the Base Squadron “Heavies”, Wing Commanders Max Kerrisk Senior Accountant Officer and Wing Commander Keith O’Brien Senior Equipment Officer. We three shared the Base Squadron staff car and all three of us lived on the Base Married Quarters “patch”.

I had a staff of three Junior officers and several NCO’s in the Orderly Room together with quite a number of locally engaged civilians. My next priority was for bringing Mattee and the two kids over to the Base firstly to see our new home, then to drive around the Base so that they could appreciate what went on each day. Butterworth being originally an Royal Air Force Base and all structures had been built and furnished to their, quite high, standards. The Married Quarter’s eastern boundary abutted the North-South Thailand-Singapore Highway. Our house was in a Court and in a cluster of three, the whole area was well grassed and coconut-palmed. There were no dividing fences and an air of spaciousness did abound. The Senior Officer appointment houses had a beach-front facing Penang Harbour and the rather delightful vista of Penang Hill in the distance. For Security reasons the area had a nine-foot steel mesh fence.

The Air Base was on the eastern side of the Highway. Directly opposite the Guard Gate into the Married Quarters was a similar gate to the Base Golf Course. Heading north from these entrances and about half a kilometre distance was the main gate to the Base on the eastern side and Officers Mess access opposite. The RAAF Hospital was next door as too was the popular RAAF Welfare Yacht Club - which was better known as “the Boatie”.

(I had the good fortune, in 2008, to be included in a visit to Malaysia for the “50 Year anniversary of the RAAF at Butterworth”. One of the areas included in the visit itinerary was the RAAF Recreational Centre at Butterworth which I believe was originally “the Boatie”). The very nature of the Base, with its large complement of single living-in personnel, “demanded” a myriad of various Welfare activities with the Golf Club and the Boat Club being the largest of these.



Another Welfare activity which provided a very much “at home” element was the Radio Station, manned completely by volunteers both uniformed personnel and family members. I did mention in the earlier part of this book that one of the “recall” to Base procedures to urgently muster personnel back to duty from Penang Island was by making appropriate Radio RAAF Butterworth announcements. The photo below shows some of the Base Executive staff paying a “getting-to-know-you” call at Radio RAAF Butterworth Studio. A similar “At Home” atmosphere could always be found over at the “Australian Hostel” on Penang Island, (also more affectionately known as “The Hostie”).



July 1973

L-R: Cpl Mike Smith, Announcer; Wg Cdr Hans Roser, CO 75Sqn; Sqn Ldr Don Scott, CO TSF; Wg Cdr John Henze, CO 478 Mntce Sqn; Wg Cdr Ted Ilton, CO HQ Flt/AdminSO; Wg Cdr Dick Bomball, CO 75 Sqn; Cp Capt David Smythe, CO Base Sqn; Air Cdr Peter Raw, DSO, DFC, AFC, OC Base. ([Back](#))

RAAF Australian Hostel Penang - "The Hostie"

([Back](#))



This Hostel was set up with the task of administering a large RAAF Centre on Penang Island where about 80% of RAAF uniformed personnel were living. Briefly, it provided three most essential services :-

1. an administrative centre on Penang Island for Medical, Dental, Housing, Provost, Chaplaincy, Post Office etc,
2. a recreational centre for Warrant Officers and below and their dependants (with some exceptions for officers and dependants) and
3. a large centre for Commonwealth servicemen and their dependants (again W.Off's and below).

From the foregoing it will be seen that the RAAF presence in Malaysia was something quite comprehensive with a multitudinous array of management elements. It was an exciting time for us, arriving just a week or so before Christmas with two main pre-occupying thoughts, moving into our Married Quarter and Robyn and Gary's situation for the new year. Robyn from her schooling viewpoint and Gary with his plan for entry into the RAAF. As far as Robyn was concerned, the Secondary schooling prospects in Penang with an Australian education template was only available from the RAAF School's Correspondence curriculum. A check with the Headmaster of the RAAF School strongly suggested that Secondary schooling by correspondence was not a favoured approach and that it would be more to Robyn's advantage to return to Australia and resume her secondary schooling there. We had always considered this as a likely option, "reservations" had been made with her being a Boarder at Gippsland Grammar School at Sale, which would have been the option had we not been posted from East Sale. As far as her return to Australia travel arrangements were concerned, was the likelihood of some debate as to the forward journey expense not being justified and perhaps some reclaim of costs by the Commonwealth.

So the decision was made, she would return to Australia to resume her Secondary Schooling and would travel back as an Indulgence passenger in a RAAF C130. As to her travel to Penang for School vacations, this would be covered by RAAF conditions of service and she would be able to come home on these occasions. Similar arrangements would be applied for Gary i.e. his return to Australia would too be by C130 but he would not be provided with any concessions for holiday return trips to Penang at public expense.

We were pleased to have these domestic dilemmas sorted out and so prepared for enjoying Christmas celebrations. What was also a joyous occasion for us was a re-union with Clive King who you might remember I had influenced his becoming a RAAF Chaplain and with whom I had "joked" about the possibilities of an "overseas Posting". Well Clive and his wife Chris and two daughters had preceded us to Butterworth and we were thrilled at the prospect of their company both socially and our involvement in a work-a-day situation - (by the way he did buy a new car and had to sell it at a considerable loss) however, he and his family were absolutely thrilled about their posting to Malaysia and all that goes with it.

We spent Christmas Day at the E and O which was something a bit different. Although it was very pleasant living in this delightful old Hotel we were looking forward to getting into our Quarter over on the Base. "To-ing and fro-ing" each day to work on the Ferry was again something of a novelty. Penang was still considered to be a "Duty Free" port, so we had the irksome business each day of being cleared through Customs. It was expected that we would be making comparisons between our first tour of Malaysia in the 60's and now this one in the '70's. One thing being quite a dramatic change was the relative increase in prices to that prevailing ten years earlier. The saving grace tho' was everything was still quite a lot cheaper than comparative costs of similar items back in Australia. The other change too was the Conditions of Service relative to Servant employment and payment for their services. No longer was this aspect serviced by the Civil Labour Office, which on the former occasion hired and fired servants on your behalf. It was now a Member's responsibility to hire and pay (included in Malaysian allowances) each Servant. Opportunities for "roting" were not without concern.



[\(Back\)](#)

Christmas came and went. Robyn headed back to Australia in a C130 late January and Gary followed a week or two later. Gary was hoping for aircrew training as a Pilot, however limited vacancies precluded his acceptance and eventually he had to accept, (late 1973), Air Electronic Officer training - more of that later. He did fly up for Christmas the following year and Robyn came up at the end of each term. We soon settled into a routine and Golf did become a very big part of our lives. Mattee had not played golf before and I only socially that being back in Australia on Wednesday afternoons which was a RAAF common Sport opportunity each week in those days. As already high-lighted in these writings, we did have a chance when previously at Butterworth to hit a golf-ball on the Base's "three hole" practice area. To now, 1972, be able to play golf at some time every day on our own Golf Course only minutes away from our home was really something. I am not exaggerating when I exhort that the RAAF Butterworth Golf Club had become the Social centre of the Base!. Opportunities were given to local Butterworth

civilians to become Members of the Club, many of these either Civil servants or local business dignitaries. One who particularly comes to mind, together with his wife Barbara, was Mr Jack Oates, General Manager of Straits Trading Company.

[\(Back\)](#)

I did meet both of these people on my previous posting to Butterworth at occasional Officer Mess functions of which they were Honorary Members. Jack's involvement with the RAAF virtually happened on "Day One" of RAAF occupancy in 1959. Jack, a Kiwi, was the number one "honcho" of Straits Butterworth. He lived in a rather lavish beach-side mansion at Butterworth and made it his business to call on the first RAAF O.C Air Commodore Keith Parsons and offer assistance including appropriate "door-opening" with the local Establishment. In fact Jack did this with each new Base O.C for the next 21 years when he retired back to New Zealand. *(I was one of ten senior officers invited back to Malaysia in 1980 by the then O.C - Air Cdr Bernie Reynolds, to attend a "Dining-Out" for Mt Jack Oates).*



While still on the topic of the RAAF Butterworth Golf Club a particular nice on-going gesture on each occasion of a Golf Club dignitary, (ex Committee member, Golf Champion or whatever), returning to Australia would be feted with a "Champagne Breakfast " on the first tee. The Club also had a quite successful Associate's division of the RAAF Butterworth Golf Club. They had their regular day on each Tuesday and ran some very successful and regular Competitions involving other local Clubs including the private Rubber Plantations Clubs of Dublin and Harvord. These too were Nine Hole Courses with 18 tees (on which we originally modelled the Butterworth Club).

Both Mattee and I were soon involved in the respective Golf Club Committees and there was hardly a day when we were either in the Club House with some clerical chore or other, out on the Course playing a few practice holes, or doing the serious bit of trying to hit the ball or make the putt in whatever Comp was on for the day. Another of the major activities on the Base that occurred every few weeks and which created some sad-ness due to departing members and friends, were the "Qantas Charters" as they were called. They came in fully loaded with the "new chums", a figure of about 250 comes to mind, unless there was someone arriving who you knew and wanted to greet, the interest usually in wanting to be on hand to farewell long-held friendships or those that had occurred at Butterworth, these were quite often sad occasions. In any event the Air Movements Staff were really quite tremendous. There was even a greater sadness when we said goodbye to Robyn on her way back to Australia. What a "come-down" a C130 Hercules Transport aircraft with the only resemblance it had to the "Jumbo" on the way up being they both had wings! Gary followed suit a few weeks later. This was the first time we would be separated from our kids for a lengthy period. Already we were looking forward to meeting Rob on her way up at the first term break at Easter time. We in fact decided to drive the Humber down to Singapore and pick her up.

This was quite an adventure driving the length of Malaysia through some lonely and jungle parts, (thoughts of Tigers and Monkeys much on our minds, the former would be a rarity but the latter fairly common). We did it though the Humber was so comfortable and a pleasure to drive. It was not long after this that my posting to Base HQ, came out. I was so pleasantly surprised being elevated to one of the top jobs in the RAAF's Administrative Branch. In addition to this, I

had my own personal Staff Car and change in M.Q, on the beach close to the O.C's quarter, next door to the swimming pool and a glorious garden and outdoor areas. We also inherited a dog, Warragul, a wonderful watch-dog and extremely affectionate and guardian to us.

I realise that I haven't made any mention about Servants. We actually took over the Cook and Amah from Nick Winter, they went with the Married Quarter - two females - Ah-Lynne and Nafia. What was a surprise was a Flt Lt Engineer mate of mine, John Connelly, got in touch with us a week or so after our arrival to tell us that he had a Cook named Satona. She had been our cook some ten years ago and with whom we exchanged Xmas cards for a while but then lost contact. He said he had not mentioned us to Satona but thought it might be a bit of fun for us to come over to his place for a Sunday morning coffee and that he would not mention it to her other than "some friends of his coming for coffee"

Well it was a rather wonderful occasion, his house was on the Butterworth water-front with spacious front veranda which was set up for morning coffee. John and his wife met us, ushered us to some nearby cane chairs then called out to Satona, "the guests are here Satona, will you please serve the coffee". To see her face as she carried in the coffee tray and to almost drop it when she saw us was really something to see, tears poured down our cheeks and it was a rather nice occasion. Her son, Subramanium. same age as Robyn, 15 (Robyn used to call him Superman 'because she couldn't pronounce his real name) he had grown into quite a handsome young man and also was moved by the occasion.

We soon settled into life on the Married Patch, all of the Base C.O's lived there and Dinner Parties were quite a common practice. Each of the servants among those on the Patch would invariably help out at these parties and it was quite common to recognize a piece of crockery, glass-wear pot or pan from your own kitchen.

The Social life at the Officers' Mess was also really great. The actual dining room was fitted with wooden louvered sliding doors and for evening social occasion and these would be opened and folded back with an outlook of well-manicured lawns and gardens, coconut palms waving in the breeze, lights of ships in the Harbour and distant Penang made for a great setting of this delightful Social venue. Moreover, the highly professional Catering for both Dinners and "Ballroom" Suppers were something else again. We loved these things during our first Tour but the drive and ferry back over to Penang did take some of the shine off them. Not so on this Tour, our Married Quarter only 15 minutes away. I really enjoyed my change of job. I was virtually the O.C's Executive Officer and as such responsible for the various protocols that went with the job of meeting and looking after the needs of visiting V.I.P's as well as writing the Visit Itineraries for such occasions. Another important responsibility, protocol, was ensuring the Royal Malaysian Air Force Commander was kept "in the picture" re V.I.P Visitors.

Formal Mess Dinners were quite frequent and required some careful planning and it was most important to remember that the Base was no longer Australian it was now the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth and that we were now only Tenants. The Malaysian Commander was a Colonel, a Fighter Pilot and quite a nice person and was our next door neighbour and with whom I had quite a lot to do with both officially and neighbourly. The Mess had what we called the Cocktail Bar, it was small, air conditioned and was often used as a V.I.P lounge for pre-dinner drinks with V.I.P's for either RAAF or RMAF functions.

I do suggest at this stage, if you haven't already read the "Brief" mentioned a page or two back which I prepared for my replacement Wg Cdr Keith Manning, you might do that now ([HERE](#)) as it does highlight the tremendous mix of activities, (both RAAF and RMAF), that were involved with my job as well as those with which all other Base Managers had to contend.

One of the "International Good Will " aspects of RAAF Management at Butterworth, and which is covered in the "Brief" mentioned in the last paragraph and was actually called RAAF Special Assistance Project or "Operation Picture". It involved an annual Grant from Canberra of ten to twelve thousand dollars to be spent on Welfare type things for donating to special neighbourhood community causes such as Visua/Audio Aids etc. Unit Commanders would take it in turns to make the presentations at the site of the recipient of the donated item.

I made a Presentation of a P.A system to a local Convent).
([Back](#))



A week or two after Christmas, Gary had made up his mind to return to Australia in order to be there on call should something positive came up with his entry into the RAAF as an aircrew trainee. I did manage to organise him into a ride or two in three of the aircraft types we had at Butterworth at that time, a Mirage, a Canberra and a Huey Chopper. He was thrilled to bits and determined more than ever to continue his pursuits for a RAAF air-crew career. Suffice to say he had to accept training as an A.E.O which would begin in the latter stages of 1973 and more of that later. With our two children now back in Australia by late January 1973 both Mattee and I were becoming more and more involved with our life-style in Malaysia. Her interest in Golf quickened as, and thankfully, also quickened, was the diminishment of her Asthma. I was really enjoying my role at the Base and also as much golf as I could fit in, either before breakfast on some mornings, after work on others, and with Competitions each Saturday and Sunday became a "golfaholic".

I have mentioned the initials V I P a few times in the last couple of pages and can say that the nature of the activities of the RAAF in Malaysia did attract all sorts of Very Important People mainly from Australia, visiting Senior (Air Rank) RAAF officers, Politicians and Public Servants. The one visitor that created a considerable amount of Staff work, before, during and after he departed was the visit in 1973 of The Rt Honourable Gough Whitlam who was then Prime

Minister of Australia. His host of course was our O.C Air Cdre Raw, and the Hostess for the day who looked after Mrs Whitlam was the OC's wife Helen and my wife Mattee. Being a former RAAF Navigator in WWII - the P.M did have a strong affinity with things RAAF and was obviously enjoying his visit to Butterworth.

[\(Back\)](#)

A few months later we had Air Vice-Marshal Fred Barnes, Air Member for Personnel and Air Vice-Marshal John (Sam) Jordan Director General of Personnel Services. I was to act as their Personal Staff Officer during their three day visit and on picking them up out at the civil airport at Penang, AVM Barnes mentioned that he thought he had heard of my posting back to Melbourne, I quickly said I hoped it was to be S.O.P (Staff Officer Personnel) at Headquarters Support Command. He said it was definitely HQSC and he thought he had heard that SOP was the appointment. I was temporarily overjoyed, but it did not last very long as on returning to my office, having left their "airships" with the OC, my Flt Lt "offsider" said my posting to HQSC was out, I quickly said "yes, and I am thrilled to bits that I am going to be SOP ". He responded, "Sir, you will have to add a UBS to the SOP ". Would you believe I was heading for the job of Staff Officer Publications, nothing to do with people affairs, but the production amendments and circulation of Technical Publications in the RAAF. What AVM Barnes had seen was Wg Cdr A Elton was posted to HQSC to be SOPUBS. So more of that in a page or two.



Cameron Highland Bungalow. [\(Back\)](#)



One of the many highlights available to visiting RAAF people to Malaysia during Butterworth days was the opportunity for a relaxing few days in the "rarefied" air of either the Cameron Highlands or Frasers Hill. This was something that "The Colonial Masters" had engineered in

the late 19th and early 20th Century whereat for a chance to get away from the tropical heat without leaving Malaysia was to “head for the Hills” (Cameron or Frasers) where quality Bungalows had been built exclusively either from Public Purse or enterprising Commercial elements for Staff recreational/sporting purposes. With Malayanisation and the drying up of long-term Expatriates, many of these Bungalows would have fallen into dis-use if it had not been for temporary “Expats” such as the Australian Servicemen and their families. Both the Cameron Highlands and Frasers Hill were equipped with Golf Courses which was an added attraction particularly with RAAF Butterworth cliental. Mattee and I did the Cameron Highlands three times and Frasers Hill once, the former at the Hong Kong & Chartered Bank Bungalow and the latter Jack Oat’s Straits Trading Company Bungalow where we joined Jack and Barbara on two occasions. It was a great way to spend a holiday, particularly as there was always the resident Servants on hand to look after your “whims” and “fancies”. Just to sit and relax in front of a log-fire of an evening, talking about the putts you missed.

Another feature of Malaysia during the “hey-day” of a Butterworth posting was the “Road House” well tried Custom of the British Colonial days. Probably the best way to describe these establishments is as being a “no bells and whistles” Motel. They were Government owned, permanently staffed and economically tariffed. We did quite a bit of driving around Malaysia during both our Tours and found this type of accommodation safe and adequately comfortable.

Now to return to our posting back to Melbourne and its ramifications.

Firstly, where will we live?. We had been hoping for a Canberra posting where we did have a house. But this didn’t happen, we would have to rent. There were two choices here, rent a Government owned house of which there were plenty but none of them famous for their spaciousness. Alternatively find a rental proposition ourselves and apply for rental assistance of \$40 per month. We chose the latter. I did a fairly “eye-catching” Ad in the *Melbourne Age*

“Senior RAAF Officer seeks a 3 bedroomed, double garage, nice garden brick house in the South East suburbs of Melbourne - \$40.00 per month”.

We had one reply an eight page copper plated hand-written response - 3 bedroom. dbl garage - two storey - clinker brick Tudor - lead-light windows - separate lounge dining room - fireplace in each - sun room - bungalow - lovely garden in a quiet Court in Burwood,

We snapped it up and were quite excited about the prospect particularly as the rent on our house in Canberra would cover rent on the Burwood property. The letter was so well written that we were even looking forward to meeting the lady who had written it. She was Zelle Hillman wife of Stan Hillman who had just retired as General Manager of Coles Bourke Street store and they had planned to retire to their sea-side house at Portsea. but not yet decided on the selling of the Burwood house.



The Burwood House. [\(Back\)](#)

With some finality to hand on our domestic arrangements back in Australia we were able to plan our packing activities, also Robyn's tertiary education. I must admit to some disappointment about our Melbourne posting, although I would have loved the S.O.P job, a posting to Canberra and an opportunity to live in our own house would have been a much better arrangement. In the event, Melbourne did work out very well domestically, Robyn had decided on Graphic Design as a Tertiary course to follow and was able to enrol in the Swinbourne Technical College. We had promised to buy her a small car suitably economical for driving to and from the College campus, about ten kms away. Gary had begun an RAAF Cadetship for Air Electronic Officer training at the RAAF Base at East Sale. He was disappointed that Pilot training had not been offered him, however, I did suggest to him there might be opportunities later on to have another crack at being a Pilot.

An earlier "forecast" of possible sea travel back to Australia based on Mattee's vaccination problems came to fruition. You might recall that our earlier posting to Malaysia carried with it Sea travel each way and that last time we travelled back to Melbourne on the "Oronsay". She wasn't coming into Penang, we would have to drive to Singapore to join her. The one stipulated condition of this form of travel was that Mattee was not to go ashore at any of the ports of call en route home. So she missed out on Bali. We had the "Car Detailing" treatment done again as we did with the Dodge back in 1963 though different to the Dodge, we drove to Singapore this time

The first few weeks in December 1974 went very quickly and were punctuated with farewell parties of various kinds with many of the good local friendships we had made as well as the normal "rounds" with our RAAF folk. Once aboard "Oronsay" we could not believe our luck, we were entitled to First Class travel but did not expect that this would be extended to a "Suite" in fact it was occupied by Dame Patty Menzies last time we were on board "Oronsay". This had one interesting result among a number of of the Australian tourists aboard and with whom we shared a dining table for 12 each evening. These other ten people had got into the habit of "pre-dinner" drinks in their respective cabins and asked that we join them. We were happy to do this and a little surprised at, when compared with our Suite, how "sardine-tin" like their cabins were. Also there was no such thing as Balcony cabins in those days. Well, as you would expect we would have to take a turn as Hosts for one of these pre-dinner sessions. This we did on our last night about ten days later. We had not discussed our Suite with any of them, did not want to appear too "hoity toity" but they were suitably impressed and we did it again the night before arriving in Sydney. Both Mattee and I loved the ocean cruising.



A "Royal" Suite on board P.&O's SS. "Oronsay" [\(Back\)](#)

We did have a wonderful trip home, smooth seas and no mishaps of any kind. Mattee did not worry about not being allowed ashore at the two ports of call, Singapore (which she had seen a lot of anyway) and Bali I did go ashore but it was extremely hot and raining. The next port of call was Sydney and we were overjoyed to be met there by son Gary who by this time was very much Cadet Gary Ilton RAAF. His Course was visiting RAAF Bases in Sydney and Brisbane. It was great to see him. He was of great assistance to us with the additional chore of having to take delivery of our Humber and then prepare it for the drive down to Melbourne. I had arranged with the R.A.C.V. to have an N.R.M.A rep meet us at the ship with a view to their being able to fine-tune things with Customs and Immigration and hopefully, an easy delivery of the car to us. I had also made arrangements to stay in an "old Haunt" of mine in Kings Cross, no 9 Springfield Avenue, where I last stayed when Gary was just a baby and I was Secretary to a RAAF Interview Board travelling around Australia. At that time it was an absolutely marvellous "old world" hostelry, regrettably not so any more. It had developed onto a real "dive". We were so disappointed and this tended to set the scene for the next twelve or so hours when we were due to pick up the car and head down the Princes Highway to Paynesville where my Dad had retired to and with whom I was looking forward to the re-contact. This all went fine, the car behaved well and both Mattee and I seemed to have been able to catch our second wind in readiness for the house "take-over" in Burwood the next afternoon

SUPPORT COMMAND DAYS. (1975) ([Back](#))

Well here we were back in Sunny Melbourne and well, a week before Christmas, it should be sunny too! I cannot deny that I enjoyed Butterworth immensely from both a professional and social aspect. I did feel honoured in being given the opportunity of having two Tours at the busiest Base in the RAAF and, in particular the icing on the cake which the sea voyage back to Australia provided. Our drive to Melbourne via the East Coast was indeed pleasant as too was the reunion with my Dad who was enjoying his retirement on the Lake at Paynesville. As you would have noticed from the photograph, our rented house at Burwood exudes the charm that we felt it surely would, given the build-up and description that Zelle Hillman had provided in her letter to us. We had a sort of picnic basket afternoon tea in the lounge room, the only furnished room in the house, and what furniture, a Jacobean three piece lounge with cabbage-rose upholstery and which she said we could have for \$200.00 and at which we jumped!

The house was located at the end of the Court containing nine other similar (1930's) Villas. It did exude character and comfort plus some hidden thoughts of ownership. (And although jumping ahead a bit we did buy it after leasing it for twelve months.) The effective date of my posting was not until third week in January so we had plenty of time to unpack and enjoy life in Suburbia. We had purchased some nice bits and pieces whilst in Malaysia some from our trips to Singapore. We were also itching to try out the new golf gear and clothes that we brought home with us and although not yet being members of a Golf Club, we decided to give the Tramways Public nine hole Course at Wattle Park a try - so off we went. There were quite a number ahead of us on the first tee which was a par three and we were a little self-conscious about not "fluffing" our first shots after a few weeks absence. Thankfully we both hit reasonable shots and marched off to the first green which on approach we could hear laughter and calling out coming from the first Tee would you know it??? Our clubs and buggies were still resting back at the tee, why? Well we had always used caddies in Malaysia and having got into the

habit pressed on, thinking our caddies was still with us? Mattee said to me “You can go back and get both sets of Clubs Dear”!

We had a nice Christmas Day, Gary came down from East Sale and of course Robyn was back living at home. We had just finished Christmas dinner and Gary remembered a young mate when we lived in East Ormond some 20 years earlier (Geoffrey Hewson) wondered whether he still lived there so he found the number in the phone book, his mother answered the phone and on Gary’s enquiry he learned that Geoffrey was at home and will hop on his bike and pop over to see us. Half an hour later his bike (a huge Harley Davidson) came roaring up the Court and a leather-gauntlet bearded Geoffrey astride. Not “Hells Angel” emblazoned on his jacket but “God’s”!

We also started something with the Court neighbours, a Christmas drink at our place as a “getting to know you” gesture, most of them had never been in the others’ house, but this for the next six years became an annual progressive affair with invitations in verse. ([Back](#))



By early January our furniture had arrived from its two-year storage in Canberra and was not in bad shape. Our Butterworth acquisitions, Grandfather Clock, corner cabinet and other small furniture items had to follow us home on a C130 and arrived a few days later. The next thing of course was beginning my new job at Victoria Barracks, or more correctly the annex thereto

which if you look at the image on the previous page, between two of the palm trees the outline of a building can just be seen. This building, on the corner of Coventry Street and St Kilda Road was the former Ministry of Repatriation office block. In fact my office on the ground floor and facing St Kilda Road had been the office suite of the Minister for Repatriation. It was really something and did in some ways make up for the fact that the SO PUBS appointment was not one I would have chosen. This probably is now an appropriate time to quote the broad function of the Staff Office Publications Directorate at the RAAF Headquarters Supporter Command: -

"...Although in a specialized area, the Staff Officer of this Directorate was essentially in a senior/executive managerial position controlling 200 subordinate staff. The broad task of the Directorate can be summarized as providing the necessary expertise and administrative effort to fund, procure, produce, amend and distribute publications for the efficient management of the Royal Australian Air Force. A budget in excess of one million dollars annually (excluding services) is controlled by the Staff Officer Publications". I was directly answerable to the Senior Administrative Staff Officer at Headquarters Support Command, Gp Capt. Brian Coleman.

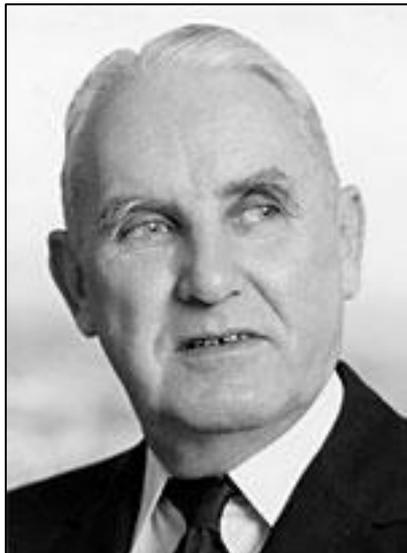
I would be less than honest if I didn't reflect at this stage on my almost complete feeling of inadequacy for this responsible position and which, unfortunately, obtained for the two years in which I held this appointment. However within a week or two I was "thrown a virtual lifeline" in the shape of being selected for one of the two Senior Officer RAAF "Seats" on the annual part/time Department of Defence Industrial Mobilization Course.

Perhaps as an "opener" some brief History and Aims of the Course: -

"The Industrial Mobilization Courses (IMC), have been run annually by Defence for more than 50 years. The aim being to develop a better understanding between Defence Industry and Public Utilities in order to improve Australia's Defence industry capabilities. The course delivers Defence/Civil executives an intimate understanding of Defence business while improving the collective knowledge of Australia's Defence industry. Not only does the course offer participants the opportunity to share ideas, collaborate and realize best practice, it also forms the keystone to forging better business contacts. The Course would begin with a week's Symposium at HMAS Cereus in February, meet weekly at Victoria Barracks for dinner and a briefing on next day's visit to an Industry or Public Utility. Absences of a week at a time would occur regularly for interstate visits to Defence establishments, appropriate Industries or Public Utilities. The Course would climax with a week's symposium at RAAF Base Laverton.

I really could not believe my good fortune, not only for being selected but also the very nature of I.M.C would require many absences from the SO Pubs office and the filling-in during this "absentee-ism" by my well-versed deputy, Squadron Leader John Burgess, who did prove to be a "tower of strength" in many ways. Many would agree with me that the IMC was one of "the Courses" on which to be selected. There were 39 enrolled in my (1975) Victorian Course (and a similar number from the NSW/ACT Course). There was a nice balance of (33) Senior Executives from both Industry and the Public Utilities together with a Naval Cdr, 2 Army Lieut/Cols and two RAAF Wg Cdrs. Administration and Hosting duties were vested in a retired Air Vice-Marshal Lush (Chairman), Group Captain Ken Janson (Director of Studies) and Sqn Ldr Tony Redmon (Asst Director). Sir Ian McLennon of BHP fame played a large part when Chair of the Post-War Reconstruction Committee and at which time he was directly instrumental in the founding of the I.M.C . He was often referred to as "the Father of I.M.C "

My list of Graduates from first twenty-five years 1953 - 1989 totals **3,198**. There is no doubt as at the time of my writing in this Book (2013) this list would have at least doubled.



Sir Ian McLennon ([Back](#))

I must say that we settled down rather nicely to becoming Victorians again, we did love Melbourne, despite the weather. Mattee was keeping well although we were not looking forward to the winter as it was a big factor which had a big influence on the stability of her health, also, as I was away from Melbourne so much on the IMC Course I did too hope that this would not be an aggravating ingredient for her health stability.

Robyn had settled into Swinbourne and was enjoying her little car. As too did she, Mattee and I begin enjoying Melbourne Football again. One of my cousins, Robert in the Peterson family, (Mum's sister Alma's youngest son) was starring with North Melbourne. He was something of a "heart-throb" for Robyn and it wasn't long before we were going to every North Melbourne match including Geelong.

I was encouraged by some of my IMC compatriots to take on Rotary membership once again, I had been a member down at Sale (also in Malaysia) so I joined the Melbourne South Club. Also another plus as far as footie was concerned was our becoming Members of the Melbourne Cricket Club. I'd had my name down for years with not much hope of an early entry as a Member, however, a mate of mine who had arrived at Butterworth just before we left told me of a well-hidden by-law of the MCC referred to as "for-the-time-being Commissioned Officers of Her Majesty's service were entitled to full MCC membership while resident in Melbourne". So I tested the water, wrote to Ian Johnson who was Secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club at the time, quoted the by-Law and presto back came a letter of approval and we so remained Full members until 1980 when we moved to the Gold Coast and the by-law then lapsed. (I did get a letter early in the '90's saying my wait for Membership has now come to fruition and I could join up for hundreds of dollars a year. On the basis that I would probably, and rarely use it so I declined).

Whilst on the subject of IMC, as well as the primary aim of the Course of, if you like "cross-pollination" of ideas and practices, it provided a tremendous opportunity for widening and consolidating new conduits and friendships. It all began on the first night at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, which was primarily one of "a getting to know you" occasion! The latter was achieved with a few short "thumbnail sketches" from all 39 of us. What quickly became apparent to me was obviously as we were going to be together a lot, both in our local environment and on the moving around the State and Inter-State as well, I thought (from my Staff College days and the benefits of a "slush funds") we might arrange to have a "pay-day" collection. The proceeds for defraying at least the costs of quarterly Social occasions with our wives and for a "present" of sorts to appropriate Hosts with whom we were to be involved on the IMC journey. I offered to be Social Secretary, and "keeper of the purse". I seem to remember that we collected \$20.00 per head each payday. And now I am able to say we did have some beaut, at least quarterly, Dinner dates. I also arranged for our Group to keep together post-IMC Courses by having a quarterly luncheon in the Officers Mess at Coventry

Street together with a Guest Speaker. Anyway, so much for the IMC, suffice it so say at this point the IMC was undoubtedly a major highlight, not only of my career but also my life - 87 years at the time of writing,

Within a few weeks of settling into our new environment we had reached a stage where we wanted to get back into golfing again and should decide where and when. I did remember an Army friend, Major Fred Moir, whom we had met in Malaysia and his mentioning his membership at the Riversdale Golf Club, (right) which was quite close to where we were now living. I knew he was back in Melbourne from a Christmas card we had received from him so we made contact and he did the rest. We did have six wonderful years of membership of this Club.



I was managing, but not without some difficulty, the learning of my new job and at the same time the fitting in to my IMC Course programme, fortunately for the first few weeks of the Course, the activities were around the Melbourne area. It began with a week at HMAS Cerberus down at Flinders Naval Depot where I first became personally involved with a new meaning for the words “Heads” which was also the Naval term for the Gentleman’s toilet. The Wardroom (Officers Mess) had recently had some major renovations done which included a number of different and delightful native wood panelling on which each different panel had a small brass plaque with the name of the particular wood, i.e. “Birch-tree, “Red-Gum-tree” etc. We were scheduled for a formal dinner in the Wardroom on the final night of our week’s stay, the toilet serving the Wardroom was adjacent to the dining room and had a rather nice wood panel entry door above which I temporarily arranged (plus a bottle of Scotch for the sign-writer) to have “HEADS” sign replaced by a neat, and similar signage, but which read “LAVA-TREE”! Unfortunately. Our Senior Naval Host was not amused!

The year 1975 proved to be quite a momentous one for me and also for my son Gary who unfortunately was the catalyst. He had earlier in the year began his Cadetship down at the RAAF East Sale Base and managed during this time to come home for the occasional weekend. We were looking forward to being part of his “Wings” Parade at the end of his Course when “things” went quite awry. I received a “tearful” phone call from him to say that he’d had a nasty bout of Chicken Pox, lost several weeks of training at the important climatic part of his Course and as a result would not be part of the Graduation proceedings neither could be “back-Coursed”. Worse still. He had the choice of being either discharged forthwith or be remustered as a General Hand (Labourer).

My concern was not one for the decision being made, but that of no communication about this matter from the School to me, after all I was a long-serving Member of the RAAF “family” and could perhaps have discussed some alternatives, one being another RAAF career “employment” avenue for which Gary might be suited. I had in mind the RAAF Supply Officer category for which I knew there were plenty of vacancies. The “Technicality” arising from this being one of an “Age” barrier. At that time only the RAAF Branches of Air-Crew or Air Traffic Control allowed for entry below the age of 21. Gary was no longer in the Air Crew stream and had no qualifications for Air Traffic Control. An even sadder part of the occasion was until now and an almost lifetime ambition of Gary’s to date was to follow his father into the Air Force and

hopefully to be a member of Air Crew which had been denied his Dad due to academic prerequisites. I told Gary, to keep his chin up and I would see if there was a way to provide for his immediate continuing in the RAAF and which would lead to his Commissioning as it would have had he completed his Aircrew Course. My plan was to find a way for Gary to be transferred to the Supply Branch of the RAAF. Earlier on in these writings I mentioned his time in the Kings School Cadet Corps and his role a Quarter Master Sergeant, the latter with its inherent characteristics of provisioning (Supply) might help? Now, having mentioned some possible hope to my son, how do I handle it without appearing to be interfering too much into what was a normal Training School Policy decision? I was a Senior Staff Officer at Headquarters Support Command with access to other Senior Staff Officers at the same HQ one of whom was the then Senior Supply Staff Officer also at Headquarters Support Command, Air Commodore Harvey Colebrook with whom I had been friendly for many years. I rang him, told him I had an urgent personal problem with which he may be able to help.

He asked me to come right over and he would see how he might be able to advise/help. I was in his office within a few minutes, had a little difficulty in controlling my emotion, but felt "if the Age of 21 policy could be relaxed in this instance Gary Ilton could be trained to fill one of the many Supply Officer vacancies in the RAAF". The Air Cdre agreed with my postulation. He rang Air Vice-Marshal Cleary, his big boss in Canberra and to whom I was also reasonably well known and had seen and talked to a few months earlier when on a Staff visit to Butterworth. He put the problem to the AVM who quickly agreed with the proposition and Cadet Gary Ilton was the very next day posted from RAAF East Sale to the RAAF's No 1 Stores (Supply) Depot at Tottenham in Melbourne for on the job training as a Supply Officer while awaiting the next Supply Officers Course. He has now served 38 years and has reached the rank of Wing Commander. I used the word momentous above, so it was for both Gary and me, his RAAF career continued and because some seeds of disappointment had been sown with the lack of Training School communication with the parent of a trainee I started to plan for "early retirement" from the RAAF. More of that later.

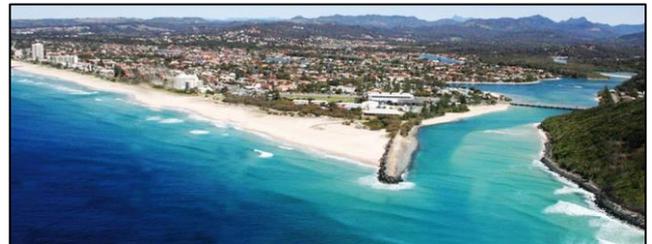


[\(Back\)](#)

We had also to think about transportation to and from work, Mattee's use of the car, possible car-pooling etc., as indeed we had to accommodate when we were last in Melbourne and I was serving down at Point Cook to be precise. So we did as before, there were four of us living in much the same districts which meant a particular wife would have use of a car for three weeks out of every four. I shared with three others one of whom was Wg Cdr Jack O'Neill the RAAF Provost Marshal and quite a character. He told a story about when shopping in the City one lunch time, waiting outside the Melbourne Town Hall for a tram back to the Barracks, a young teen-age lass with a tight button-up skirt was standing in front of him when stepping up to get into the tram she realized her skirt was too tight for the step so put her hands back to unbutton her skirt the tram was about to move off and Jack quickly lifted her up into the tram she quickly commented: "thank you sir, the age of chivalry is obviously still alive and well" !. To which Jack quickly responded: "age or chivalry be buggared Madam, they had nothing to do with it, you were unbuttoning my fly"!

Our Clitheroe Court community had really responded to our Christmas hospitality with a quite realistic attitude of strengthening neighbourliness. Particularly on our Western side, almost a twin of our lovely house, Ron and Shirley Pontin, delightful people and with whom we became the warmest of friends. Ron was a member of the Yarra Yarra Golf Club and he and I shared reciprocal visits to our own Golf Clubs on special Golf and/or Social occasions. As I noted a paragraph or two ago, we did buy the Clitheroe property. The Hillmans had been a little reticent about selling due to some uncertainty about their daughter's marriage in the USA but which had consolidated. They were aware of our keen-ness to purchase, which we were able to do thanks to the sale of our Canberra house. I also had opportunities to renew Relative associations. My ageing mother was living out at Nunawading, her two children from her second marriage, John and Pam, also lived in the same general area. As did Dad, who by this time had been elevated to being the Station Master at Spencer Street. He and his brother Claude, a favourite Uncle of mine responded more than willingly to my long-standing genuine invitation for each of them to become members of my Masonic Lodge in East Melbourne and to enjoy some great Fellowship.

We were also pleased to have the opportunity once more to renew our annual visit to the Gold Coast and even better still to obtain the same great little Palm Beach Unit that had been our custom and enjoyment in the past. So off we went, first week in September 1974 and the only change being that we did not have Gary and Robyn with us. I must admit I did start to think a little more about, as mentioned a few pages back, in continuing service in the RAAF. Much and all as I had loved every minute of it, and had travelled further "up the ranks" as I had ever hoped given my limited academic level of year three High School. Moreover with the still, but maybe limited chance, I could perhaps be in the queue for promotion to Group Captain which would carry with it the strong likelihood of a posting to Canberra but we did not want to move from Melbourne! Oddly enough at that particular time there was an Honorary Rank policy which entitled long serving officers to be granted the next higher rank subject to 20 years of satisfactory service and four years in their current substantive rank. I had already qualified for this however the incoming Labor Government in 1975 removed many Imperial Honour including the Honorary rank policy for Officers of the Defence Forces on retirement.



I admit too. that I was still a little aggrieved by the absence of opportunities for discussion when Gary's future was being determined as a result of his bout of Chicken Pox a few weeks before graduation and rendering unavoidable his removal from the Air Electronic Officer's Course. However leaving the RAAF these were only thoughts but did have some momentum .

So the first part of my retirement plan was going to be to endeavour to locate and secure a suitable job within my skill range and minimum remuneration. I started with a regular searching in the Melbourne "Age" soon after our return from the Gold Coast in October 1975. Due to the I.M.C commitment and its daily programme, the time for job hunting was pretty limited until a job appeared in the "Age" just before Christmas, an Administrative Officer with the Victorian Institute of Colleges in St Kilda Road, just down from the Victoria Barracks. The published Job Description was one that fitted my "Barrow" other than the little "thing" of my not having seemingly the minor consideration of an University Degree! I thought I would "have a go"

anyway even if only for the practice. As it turned out, and maybe in my favour, was that the Business Manager of the Institute and the initial interviewer of applicants for the Position, was an ex-RAAF Group Captain, Carl Blake! I did not know him, only of him (he was a recent RAAF retiree) but I must have impressed him sufficiently to get on a Short List for the next stage and that was an interview with the President of the Institute Dr Philip Law (of Antarctic fame). I must have impressed him too as I was appointed to the Position at the end of March 1976.

The one snag then was our planned and booked six week World Trip. Again I was fortunate in that both the Business Manager and the Institute President agreed to my commencement date being effective on 1st June 1976. Then I must say came the hardest part, that being the separation from my beloved Royal Australian Air Force - a tearful (only mine) departure was not a part of the proceedings. There was to be "no banging of Drums" or the playing of suitable martial music by the RAAF's Central Band however, if I may say, I am extremely happy to report, that Air Commodore Tony Tonkin OBE, the then 1976 Officer Commanding RAAF Station Point Cook did, on my last day in the RAAF (30th March 1976) invite me to a farewell luncheon in the Officers Mess at Point Cook. The occasion was attended by all the Commanding Officers of Squadrons and Units at Point Cook. He presented me with a suitably autographed copy by those present of "The RAAF Golden Years 1921-76".



Given that this Book was to be about Ted Ilton and his life in the RAAF it would not be inappropriate to "draw the curtains" here however, shortly after I retired (1977) I was invited to be the inaugural Regional (Victorian) Commandant of the RAAF's Air Training Corps. I felt quite honoured and hastened to accept the invitation which led to one of my proudest Air Force occasions/achievements – I refer to the annual Air Training Corps Drill Parade which was held at RAAF Station Laverton in connection with the annual Drill and Ceremonial Parades for Air Training Corps in Australian capital cities.

[\(Back\)](#)

As Regional Commandant for Victoria, I noted that the Reviewing Officer for these occasions was often a Senior retired RAAF officer so the thought occurred to me what a wonderful occasion it would be if Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams KBE CB DSO could be invited to be the Reviewing Officer for the Victorian Air Training Corps Annual Parade. I first discussed it with the ATC Staff Officers at the North Melbourne drill Hall who quickly and excitedly took the suggestion on board and as I had said subject also to the approval of the Air Officer Commanding Support Command, Air Vice Marshal F Barnes DFC AFC and with the non-objection of the Station Commander at RAAF Laverton Group Captain R N Law ADC who whole heartedly agreed with my suggestion. The AOC asked me if I would act as the Air Marshal's Staff Officer for the day. He also cleared me to



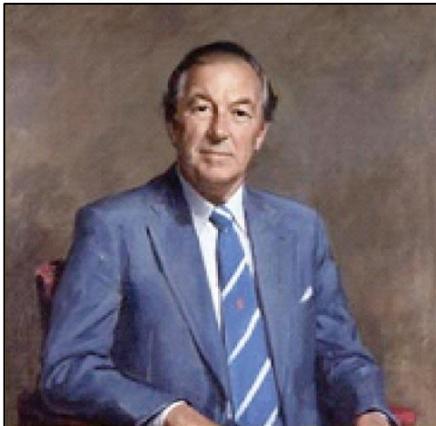
COPYRIGHT KRYSSTIL MELAINE

liaise with Command HQ Transport Section for a VIP Staff Car for the occasion. Despite his age, 86, Sir Richard was as bright as a button on the Day, as I am sure he was on any other occasion to which he was either a Guest or taking some ceremonial role in his long tagged and revered title "Father of the RAAF".

On this occasion, Sir Richard, during his Review of the Parade, not only inspected each line of Cadets but spoke to many of them and was quick to comment with praise accompanied by questions about what did they do in the Air TC and are they going to join the RAAF. He seemed quite impressed with the responses he received. This conviviality was continued in the Airmen's Mess Hall at the conclusion of the Parade.

Now that I am at this part of my Book (2014) I do feel inclined to speak about two other jobs I had - or one I nearly had.

Firstly I had built up in my first year at the Institute of Colleges a continuing difficulty with the Business Manager and his Management style. I knew that I would never be able to share in his methods and still remain sane if I worked there much longer. So the Melbourne Age became once again the likely source for a change in jobs and there I was attracted to a Victorian Public Service advertisement seeking a Chief Protocol Officer from the senior ranks of the Navy, Army or Air Force. I submitted an application stating my continuing involvement particularly in Malaysia (two occasions), nearly five years in total and my frequent involvement with Senior Political and Diplomatic staff. The selection programme went on for about 3 months and at my third interview I was advised that I had reached a short list of two and had been "beaten" by my opponent, a 45 year-old Lieutenant Colonel. I was a Wing Commander aged 50. Disappointed at the time but later I learned that the position was one where you were constantly (seemingly anyway) at everyone's beck and call. I kept looking.



Something completely different took my notice, there appeared a vacancy as the State Administrator of the R.S.P.C.A. I applied for and won this job in 1978 and stuck at it for two years after which time I succumbed to what was then commonly known as a "Nervous Breakdown"! My major success was convincing Premier Hamer that the RSPCA was entitled to more than \$80,000 per year for its 6 inspectors, my request was for \$200,000. This was granted, following which I resigned for Health reasons and we headed for the Gold Coast.

[\(Back\)](#)

Thirty-five years later I look back proudly for quite a number of reasons. I can safely justify that my RAAF umbilical cord is still safely attached! This claim allows me to finish off my Book with the use of Epilogues of various kinds which have also been included as separate Attachments

Also I quote this Truism "Traditions light the path to the future and strengthen our hold on the past"

EPILOGUE.

MATERIAL IN SUPPORT.



From Waif to RAAF.

13 MAY 1972

Royal Australian Air Force

P29 JUNE 66 CONFIDENTIAL OFFICERS AND AIRCREW

RECORDED	60	60	RAS	55
SUMMARIZED			INITIALS	10/7
TYPING CHECKED				
SCORES CHECKED	6			
SCORES ENTERED	AM			
PROMOTION DRAFT				17/5

FEB 72 HQESL ADMIN/10

ABO 45/12

PART I Type or neatly print detail from unit records

1. NAME ILTON	Alfred Edward		NUMBER 032330
5. RANK (SUBSTANTIVE) Wg Cdr DATE 1 Jan 71		X	8. DATE OF BIRTH 4 Mar 27
9. BRANCH Spec D	Admin	1 Mar 72	12. DATE OF ARRIVAL AT UNIT 8 Jan 71
13. OCCASION FOR REPORT Annual Report		AAG 121	27 Apr 71

PART II Member to complete

1. APPOINTMENT/DUTY <i>Administrative Staff officer Headquarters RAAF & Liaison and CO HQ units.</i>	President Cross Committee Gen Service Relations Officer
3. PROMOTION EXAMS PASSED <i>B, C, Q</i>	NIL
5. SPECIALIST COURSES (POST GRADUATE COURSE) <i>PSC</i>	ADAMSCOL JSSCB WAR R/CB
7. PREFERENCE FOR NEXT APPOINTMENT <i>Overseas Staff Duties</i>	NIL
<i>Admin SO</i>	
<i>At the ...</i>	

PROFICIENCY IN PRIMARY APPOINTMENT					
PROFICIENCY	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Proficiency is barely adequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Proficiency is satisfactory	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Proficiency is better than most	<input type="checkbox"/> Proficiency is outstanding
2. PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is barely adequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is better than most	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is outstanding
3. RELIABILITY	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Not always reliable	<input type="checkbox"/> Adequately reliable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reliable in most circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> Can be depended upon completely

F - GENERAL ABILITY					
1. YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIS FUTURE POSTING	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to have him	<input type="checkbox"/> Be satisfied to have him	<input type="checkbox"/> Be pleased to have him	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Particularly desire to have him
2. YOUR ASSESSMENT OF HIS POTENTIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks capacity for wider responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Could qualify for wider responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Has the capacity for wider responsibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Has outstanding potential
3. OVERALL EVALUATION INCURRENT RANK	<input type="checkbox"/> Unobserved	<input type="checkbox"/> Barely adequate as an officer	<input type="checkbox"/> A satisfactory officer	<input type="checkbox"/> A very effective and competent officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An outstanding officer

G - GENERAL COMMENTS (Mandatory) When the officer is recommended for promotion, the commanding officer is to record his assessment of the member's fitness for promotion.

A tireless worker this officer has a grasp of administrative procedures and personnel management that is second to none. His store of background knowledge of his branch has been invaluable and saved time consuming research. Interested in the more junior members of his branch he takes considerable time and effort to assist these people in order to raise the general standard of administration throughout the Base.

His secondary duties have been carried out in the same thorough manner as his primary appointment. Due to his efforts in the public relations field East Sale has possibly the highest standing in the local community than ever before. Although active in Service clubs his participation in civil affairs does not rise there, and on many occasions he has represented the Base at functions that require a high degree of diplomacy and an ability to mix and speak to people of considerable standing in the community. As IAC he has maintained mess affairs at a high level and has created an affinity between units and individual officers that has a significant effect on the morale of officers on this Base.

He is recommended for promotion and would be more than capable of accepting any of the courses desired or preferences for next duty station.

The member has been interviewed.

PART IV

Having considered the assessments recorded in Part III and having compared the performance of the member in relation to the other officers of the same rank in the Branch, my assessment is as follows:

	In bottom 10%	In next 10%	In middle 30%	In next best 20%	In best 10%	Annotation	Department of Air use only
A: Personal Qualities				X			
B: Proficiency in Administrative Details				X			✓ 26
C: Proficiency in Management of Personnel				X			✓
D: Proficiency in Planning and Directing				X			✓
E: Proficiency in Category <i>PRIMARY Appointment</i>					X		✓ 60
F: General Ability				X			✓

2- GENERAL COMMENTS: (To be typewritten):

A cheerful extrovert, who abounds in self confidence and energy.

He is most tactful and is socially at ease in any company. As AIC of the Officers' Mess his direction and firm control have resulted in an atmosphere of conviviality and harmony, but with a high standard of decorum which other messes might envy.

As the Base Senior Administrative Officer, he has been invaluable as the strong right arm of the Officer Commanding and through his personality and administrative ability the unit continues to operate most efficiently and is one of the most trouble free in the Command.

Both he and his wife have excellent social attributes and could represent the Service with credit.

This officer has the capability of doing very well in the RAAF and should be considered for promotion ahead of his contemporaries.

3. FITNESS FOR PROMOTION

(Based on paras 1 and 2 of this Part and to be irrespective of promotion exam attainments or time in present rank.)

Specially Recommended Suitable

Fit Now Likely to become Suitable

Likely To Become Fit Not Suitable

Unlikely To Become Fit Further Promotion Inadvisable

MEMBER IS ASSESSED IN THE SUBSTANTIVE RANK OF *Wg Cdr*

DATE: <i>MAY 72</i>	SIGNATURE AND RANK: <i>J.P. Fleming Gp Cpt</i>	REPORTING OFFICER: <i>J.H. FLEMING</i>	APPOINTMENT: <i>S ADMIN SO</i>	UNIT: <i>HQSC</i>
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PART V

FORMATION - HEADQUARTERS

Noted as above

DATE: <i>10/10/72</i>	SIGNATURE AND RANK: <i>[Signature] Wg Cdr</i>	REPORTING OFFICER: <i>K.S. HEINRICH</i>	APPOINTMENT: <i>DEC</i>	UNIT: <i>HQSC</i>
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PART VI

1. PROFICIENCY IN CATEGORY	In bottom 10%	In next 25%	In middle 30%	In next best 25%	APPOINTMENT
2.					

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AIR BASE BUTTERWORTH



**MINI-RE-UNION 14 NOVEMBER 1973
FOR RAAF "PAPA-SIERRA-CHARLIES"**

**DINNER MENU
OFFICERS MESS**

÷ R.S.C ÷
"Duty Syndicate"
14th November
1973

<u>Student.</u>	<u>Ex Staff Course.</u>	<u>Other Claims to Fame</u>
AVM R. Susans	- 1949 - Course No - *	{ "D.S." Jan 59 - Jan 62 Comdt. - Dec 67 - May 69 "D.S." Jan 60 - Jan 63 "Comdt. - Mar 70 - Nov 72
Air Lt Col D. Kurditch	- 1951 - Course No	
Air Lt Col R. Raw	- 1955 - Course (RAF)	
Y Capt. L. K. Ware.	- 1961 - Course No 15 *	
Y Capt. L. Smythe	- 1959 - Course No 13	"D.S." Jan 62 - Jan 66
Y Capt. W. Korsman	- 1955 - Course (RAF)	"D.S." Jan 69 - Dec 70
Wg Cdr N. Kerrisk	- 1965 - Course No 19	"D.S." Jan 68 - Dec 69
Wg Cdr J. Puleston Jones	- 1968 - Course No 22	{ "D.S." Dec 68 - Apr 71 "D.S." - Jan 74 - retirement?
Wg Cdr J. Pratt	- 1967 - Course No 21 *	
Wg Cdr R. Zell	- 1970 - Course (RAF) *	
Wg Cdr E. Ilton	- 1968 - Course No 22 *	
Wg Cdr K. C. Fries	- 1970 - Course No 24 *	
Wg Cdr J. Pederick	- 1967 - Course No 21 *	
Wg Cdr R. Bomball	- 1969 - Course No 23 *	
Wg Cdr R. Graaford	- 1969 - Course No 23 *	

* DODGED BEING SELECTED FOR "D.S." !!

A SUGGESTED SOLUTION TO
MENU - STAFF COLLEGE RE-UNION DINNER
14 NOV 73

Cream of Tomato Soup

Chicken Satay

Grilled Fillet Steak - Garlic Butter

Foil Baked Potatoes

Tomato Farcie

Buttered Green Beans

Fruit Salad and Vanilla Ice Cream

Cheese and Biscuits

Coffee

* * * * *

'Point to Ponder' - Extract from Lexicos No 12.

Student Definition

COD Definition

OMNIVORE:

'Living-out Padre'

'One who devours everything'

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SOME PERSONAL PARTICULARSOFWING COMMANDER A.E. (TED) ILTON (RET'D)
AFAIM, MIPMA, PSC (RAAF)

(Who seeks an employment opportunity)
as an Executive's Associate.

Ted Ilton retired from the R.A.A.F. in 1976 after 30 years service which included senior administrative and staff officer posts in Australia and overseas. He also saw active service in Korea and Malaya.

He is a graduate of the R.A.A.F. Staff College and of the Department of Defence Industrial Mobilisation Course (1975). He was appointed as Deputy Administrator of the R.S.P.C.A in April 1977 and then to the Chief Executive post of State Administrator in June 1977 from which position he is retiring on 24th August 1979.

Melbourne-born, the 52 year old Administrator is an Associate Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a Member of the Institute of Personnel Management of Australia.

He lives at Burwood with his wife. He has two children, a 22 year old daughter who is a Graduate in Graphic Design and a 25 year old son who is a Flight Lieutenant in the R.A.A.F.

Ted Ilton is a member of the Rotary Club of Forest Hill, the Naval and Military Club, the R.A.C.V. Club and the Riversdale Golf Club. He was also the State Commandant for Victoria of the R.A.A.F's Air Training Corps until November 1978.

Ted's particular professional interests and experiences are related to:

- . Personnel and Office Management
- . Servicing of Committees
- . Conference Planning and Co-Ordination
- . Report Writing (including research of submissions to Government)
- . Travel Itinerary Preparation
- . Reception and Escort of V.I.P's
- . Social Function Planning
- . Annual Report and Staff Journal preparation/writing
- . Public Relations, and
- . Senior level contacts in State Government, Statutory bodies and in Commercial spheres.

Ted would like to put the above disciplines to good use in an appropriate "Associate" or "Staff Officer" type role in support of a Senior Manager - Managing Director context. He will be available for employment as from mid-October 1979, (either full or part-time).

Further contact can be made with Ted Ilton and thus enabling him to develop the above in more detail, on home telephone 292640 or at 9 Clitheroe Court BURWOOD.

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members who
I've been able to
"Re-Settle" in a
relaxed and
happy Retirement
on the "Sunny
Gold Coast"!*

Queensland

My contact details are: **A.E. (Ted) Ilton** Wg. Cdr. Ret.
SALES MANAGER

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- . Arched and tiled entrance gallery. double front door.
- . Formal entry leading to spacious lounge dining area.
- . Spacious kitchen and family room.
- . Three guest bed-rooms (one ideal for study)
- . Master bed-room with dressing-room and full ensuite bathroom (at opposite end to guest rooms)
- . En-suite bath-room in main guest bed-room.
- . Bath bath-room adjacent to second guest bed-room.
- . Laundry/utility room.
- . Carpets in living areas and bed-rooms - floor tiles elsewhere.
- . Covered outdoor patio area and in-ground pool.
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A/Hrs. 34-1683

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GOLD COAST HIGHWAY,
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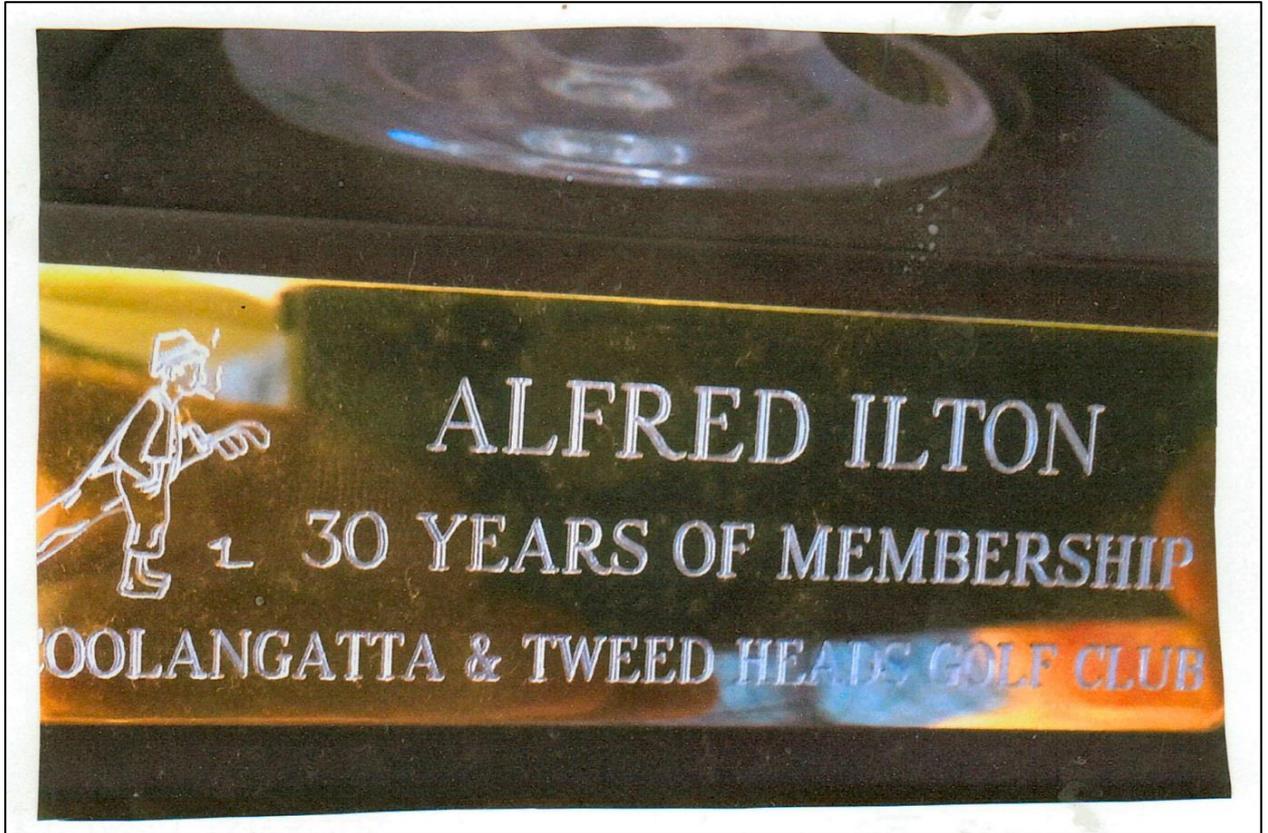
SALES MANAGER:
A. E. (Ted) ILTON,
A.F.A.I.M. M.I.P.M.A.,
P.S.C. (RAAF.)

Photographic Impressions (June 1983)
of :-



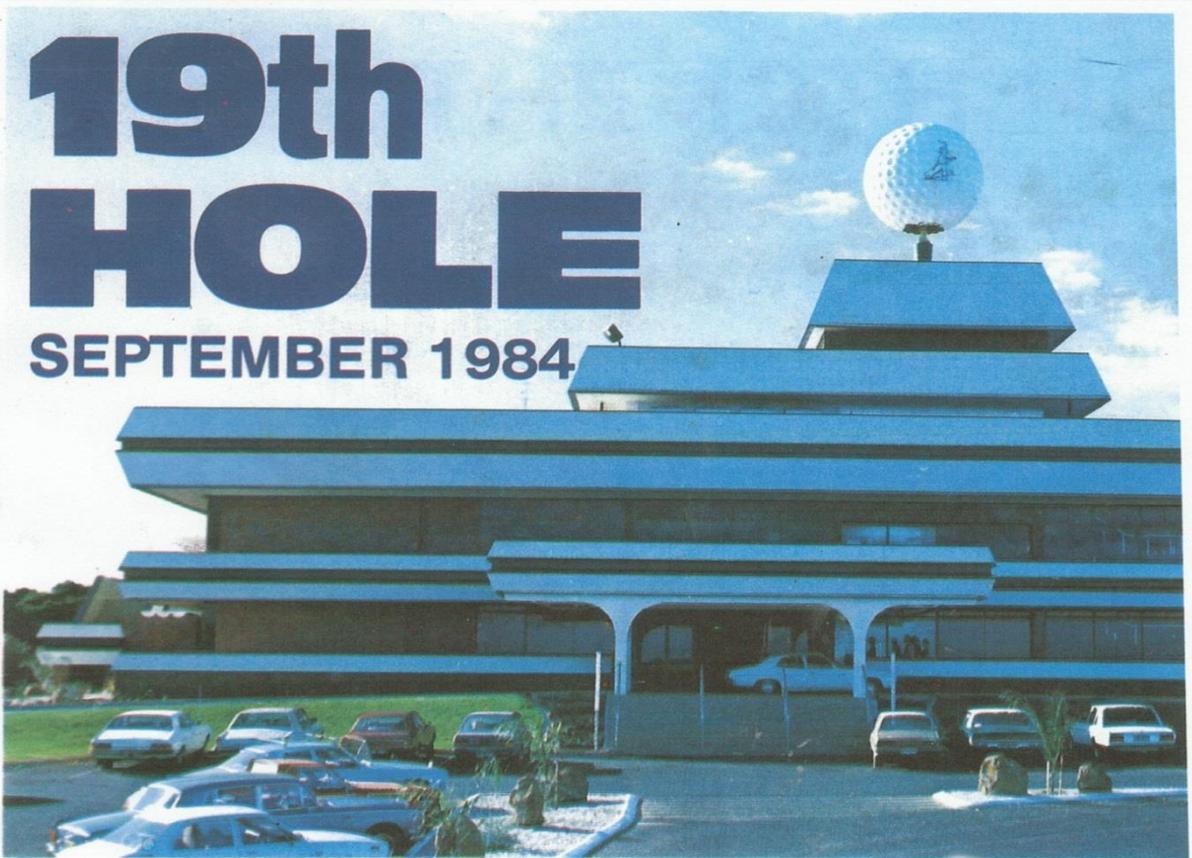
*Residence at No 11 Bastille Court,
"Isle of Capri" - Gold Coast.
- Queensland -*

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19th HOLE

SEPTEMBER 1984



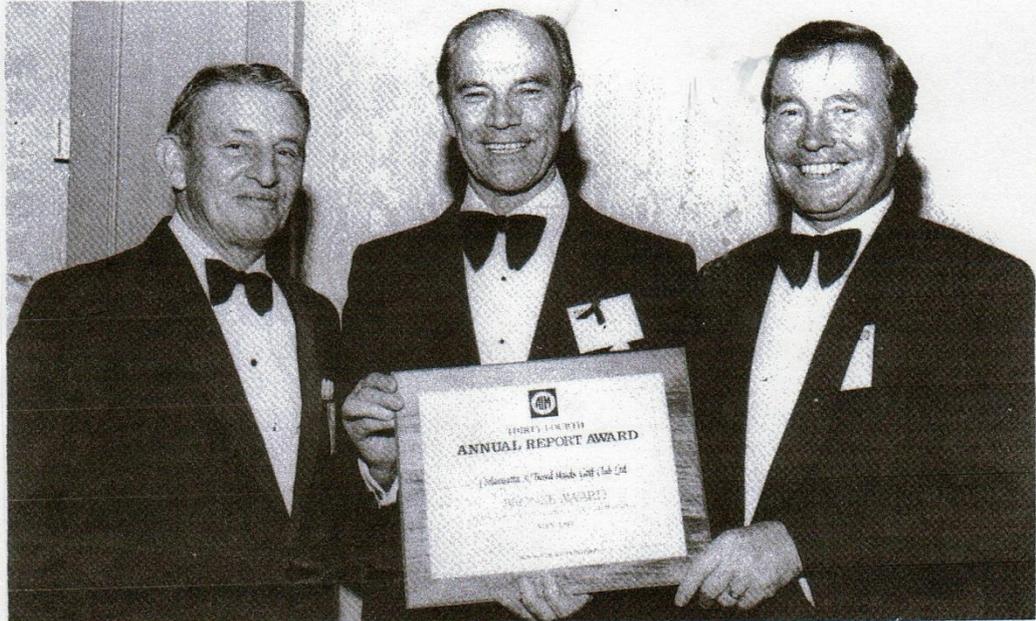
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Coolangatta & Tweed Heads Golf Club Ltd.



Australian Institute of Management (N.S.W. Division) "Annual Report Awards", May 1984, "Sheraton-Wentworth Hotel", Sydney. Bronze award being presented to Coolangatta & Tweed Heads by President A.I.M. N.S.W. Professor R. Olsson. L to R: President C.T.H.G.C. Percy Roberts, Professor R. Olsson, President A.I.M. N.S.W., Director C.T.H.G.C. Ted Ilton.

CLUB DIRECTORS, 1985/86



BACK ROW:— Dennis Claydon, Max Walker, Roy Gleeson, Kevin Preston, Barry Cox, Ted Ilton.
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FRONT ROW (l. to r.): M. Witney, E. Faulkner, P. Ridley, M. Ilton, H. Medson, M. J. Bailey, D. Robinson, B. Tattam.

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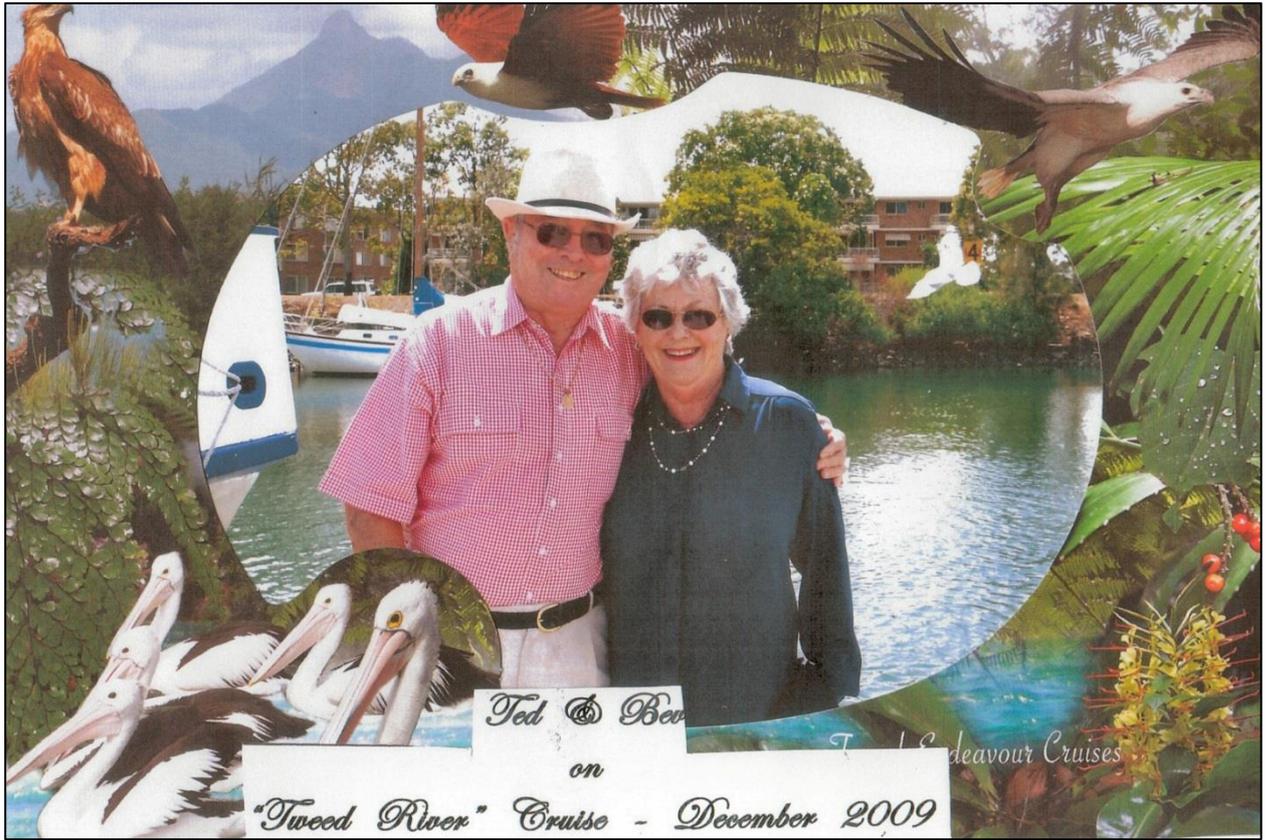
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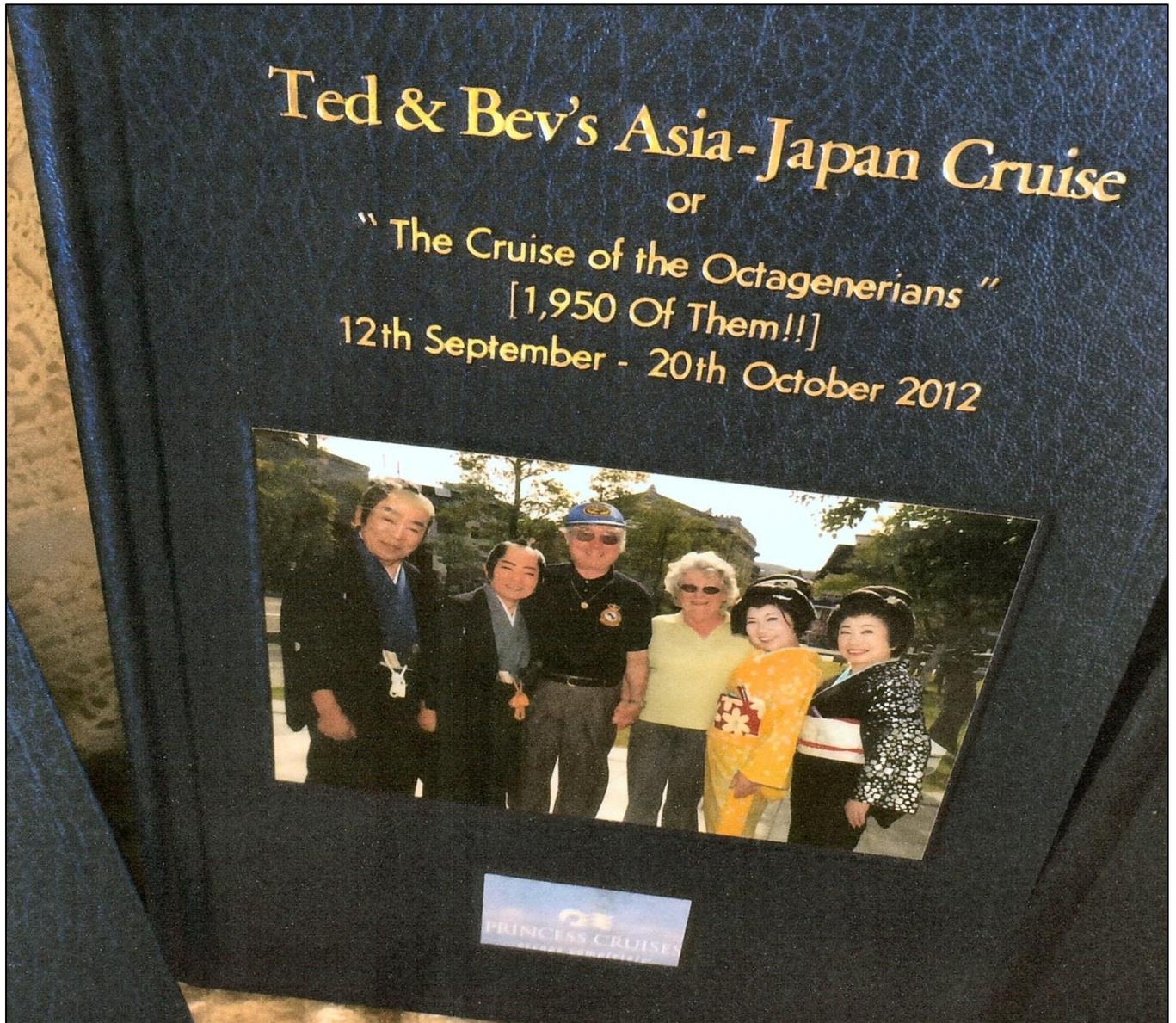
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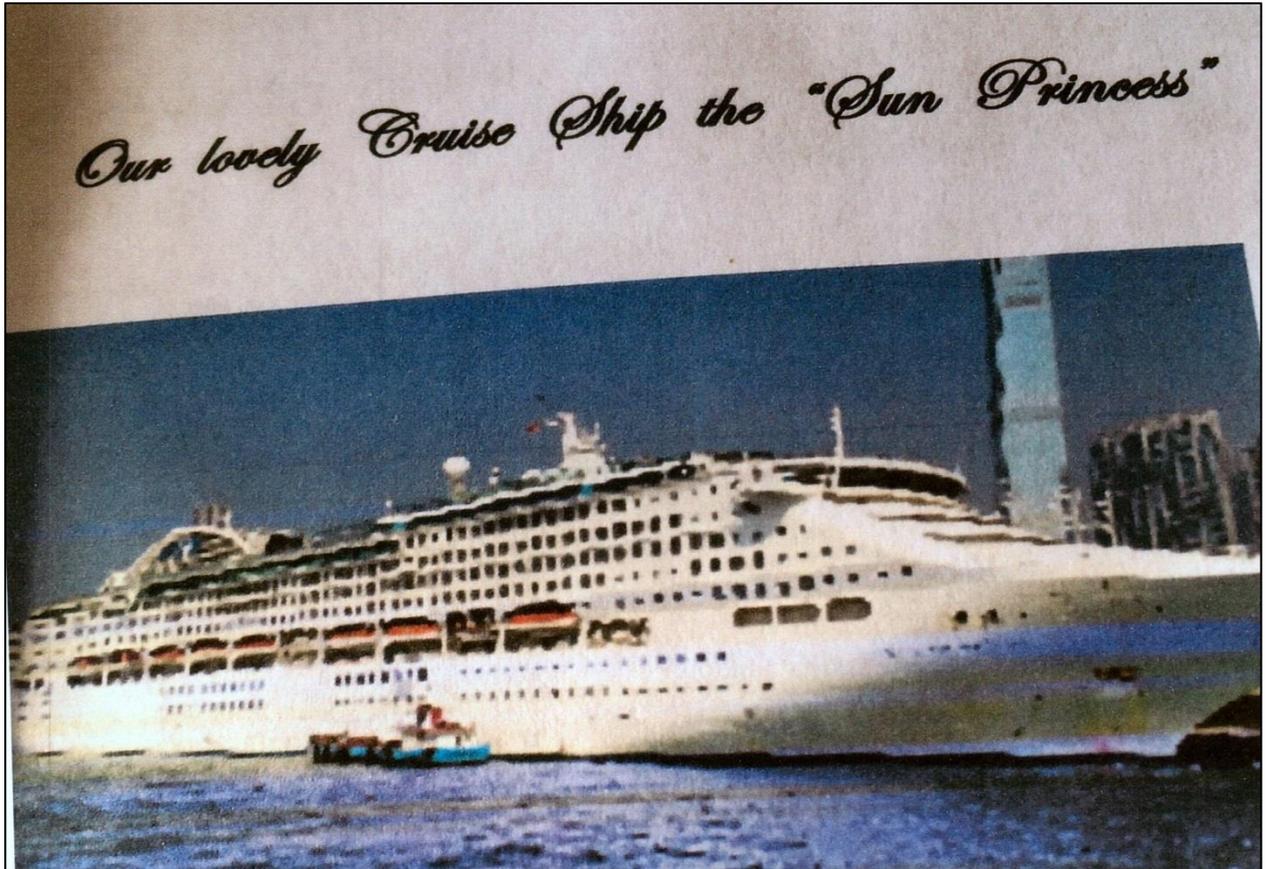


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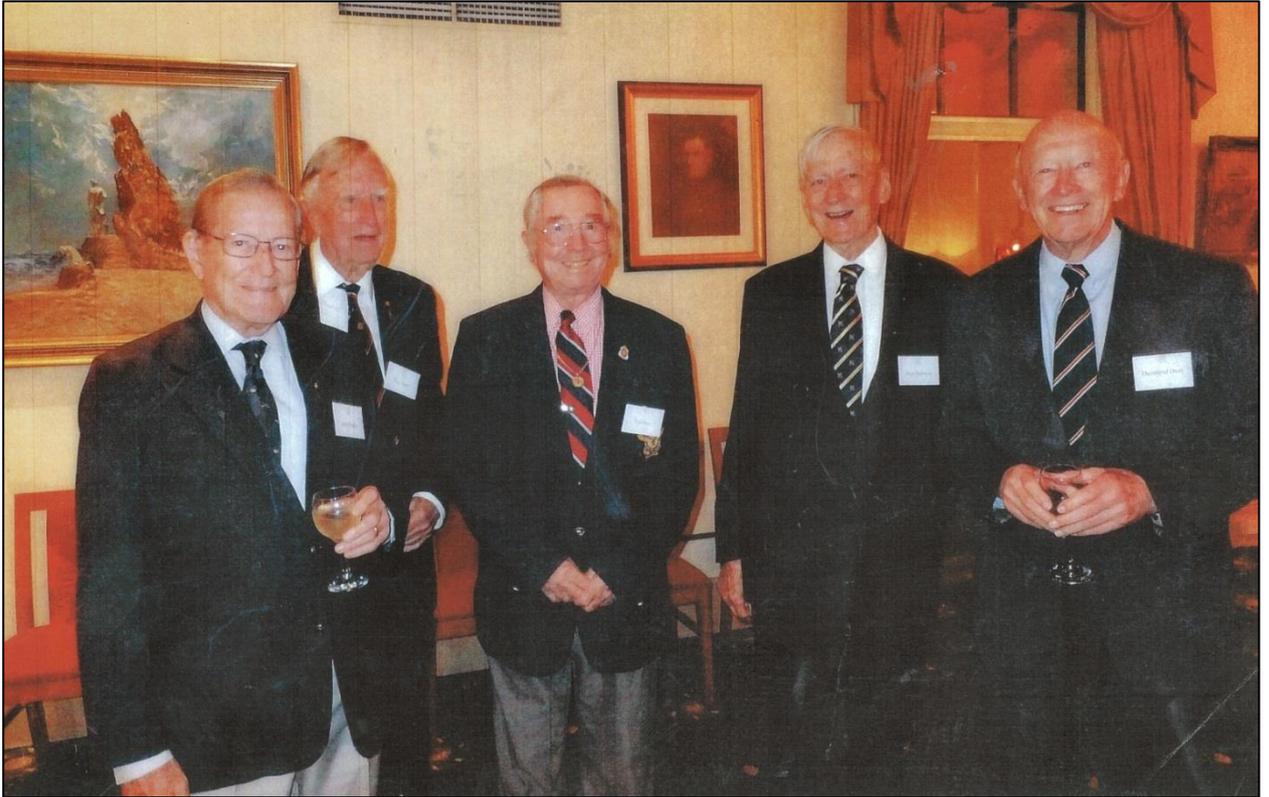








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The RAAF Staff College Association

by Wing Commander Ted Ilton (Ret'd)

History

Despite almost five decades of RAAF conducted Staff College courses — during which time there have been about 1300 graduates — there has not been, until my recent (1987) prompting, any formal Association of Graduates. The annual one day reunion at the Staff College campus had continued to be the only 'keeping in touch' opportunity for Graduates. Although the details of each year's Reunion were easily disseminated to those Graduates still serving in the RAAF, this had not been the case with those who had retired and who had not kept a current address registered with the Staff College. This was highlighted at the 1987 Reunion when only 17 retired Graduates were in attendance. It was this dramatically depleted number that prompted me to propose a RAAF Staff College Graduates Association with the initial aim of restoring attendance at the annual Reunion and a subsequent strengthening of the Graduate common bond.

Both Air Force Office and the RAAF Staff College supported the proposal and the first step undertaken was to prepare from College records an alphabetical

Nominal Roll and addresses of all Graduates since the Course's inception in 1944 — almost 50 Courses. The most difficult part of this task proved to be — and indeed continues to be — tracing the current whereabouts of Retired Graduates who represent over 60% of Staff College Course Graduates.

Despite the many gaps in the resultant address list, a sufficient body of opinion was determined which endorsed the proposal to form a RAAF Staff College Association.

The Association was subsequently formed in 1990, the aims of which are to:

- foster and maintain the unique bond of professionalism and camaraderie established through Staff College participation, and to
- promote a continuing awareness within the RAAF and elsewhere of Defence issues and of Air Power in particular.

Up-Up-And-Away

The Annual Reunion at the College late last year established beyond doubt that the Association can really be said to be 'up-up-and-away'. The 1992 attendance of 150 significantly outshone the less than 50 of just two years ago. What was even more heartening was the large

number of Air Rank Officers who were present at this recent reunion, headed by former CDFS ACM Sir Neville McNamara AO KBE AFC, together with the current Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) Air Marshal I.B. Gratton AO AFC, and the previous CAS Air Marshal R.G. Funnell AC.

More Members Needed

At the Annual General meeting held at RAAF Fairbairn in conjunction with the Reunion, the Commandant of the Staff College (and a Vice-President of the Association) Group Captain Brenton Espeland AM, emphasised the need for a continuing membership drive for the Association, not only from retired graduates but also from those who are still in the Service or allied areas. This, he said, 'would create unique opportunities for exchanges of viewpoints between those who had served and those who are still serving'.

Membership of the Association is open to all graduates of the RAAF Staff College (or other accredited Military Staff Colleges), and details and application forms are available from The Secretary, RAAF Staff College Association, RAAF Staff College, Fairbairn, ACT 2601.

RAAF STAFF COLLEGE ASSOCIATION — EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OCTOBER '92

Back Row (L to R): GP CAPT B. Espeland, RSC Commandant & Vice-Pres; AIR CDRE S. Dallywater (Ret) WA Rep.; WG CDR J. Harris (Ret'd) Hon Sec; Mr F. Kelly, APS Hon Treas; AIR CDRE E. Tonkin (Ret'd) VIC/TAS Rep; GP CAPT M. Moore (Ret'd) NSW Rep; WG CDR D. Oxenham (Ret'd) Qld Rep; AVM J. Flemming (Ret'd) Vice-Pres & ACT Rep.

Front Row: AM S.D. Evans (Ret'd) Patron; WG CDR E. Ilton (Ret'd) President.

Absent: AVM M. Ridgway (Ret'd) SA/NT Rep.

(Photograph taken at HQ RAAF Base FAIRBAIRN — Courtesy of Base Photographic Section)





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AIR FORCE

NEWS

The official newspaper of the Royal Australian Air Force

Volume 45, No. 16, September 11, 2003

ISSN 1329-8909

Point Cook sale

By Rebecca Codey

THE Federal Government has announced the freehold sale this financial year of RAAF Base Point Cook, Australia's oldest air base, but the heritage of the Air Force will not be lost with the Commonwealth retaining ownership of the RAAF Museum and a RAAF Heritage Precinct.

The decision, announced by Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence Fran Bailey, follows 12 months of consultation.

CAF Air Marshal Angus Houston has assured the men and women of the Air Force that Point Cook, which he described as the Service's "ancestral home", would never be forgotten.

"We are one of the oldest air forces in the world with a strong history of service and sacrifice," AIRMSHL Houston said.

"Our history is important to us, and Point Cook holds a symbolic place in the history of the Royal Australian Air Force - it is the foundation on which we have built the organisation we are today.

"We will continue to build on that past, and move forward into the future with pride."

AIRMSHL Houston said the excision of a RAAF Museum and separate RAAF Heritage Precinct would ensure that tangible reminders of the past endure.

Ms Bailey said the move would allow the Defence family and the broader community to continue to enjoy these valuable facilities.

At a glance

- Point Cook will be sold this financial year.
- The Commonwealth retains the RAAF Museum and a RAAF Heritage Precinct.
- The precinct incorporates buildings, hangars and aprons on the airfield side of Williams Road.
- The airfield remains an operating airfield for civilian use and for RAAF Museum historic flying displays.
- The RAAF Museum will have the room to expand its display area.
- Many of the old Bellman hangars, the cadets quarters, married quarters, workshops, stores sheds, the seaplane jetty and other historic assets in the areas to be sold will be included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

The Department of Defence established the Project Steering Committee (PSC) in 2001 to oversee the disposal of RAAF Base Point Cook after it was assessed as surplus to Defence requirements. Chaired by Don Hayward, the PSC consulted with the local community and relevant government agencies.

A plan that ensured Point Cook

Museum looks to a confident future

By Rebecca Codey

IT'S business as usual for the RAAF Museum Point Cook with news the Museum and heritage aspects of the base will not be sold.

Museum Director David Gardner said employees and volunteers alike were pleased the Commonwealth Government will retain ownership of the RAAF Museum Precinct and a RAAF Heritage Precinct in recognition of the site's important heritage value.

"We now know what the future holds and we look forward to continuing to preserve and promote the history of the Royal Australian Air Force," Mr Gardner said.

He said the consultation process was transparent from the outset, therefore the impending sale of Point Cook was well known.

would continue as an operating airfield, that the RAAF Museum would remain at Point Cook, and the heritage aspects of the base would be preserved had the in-principle support of the Federal, State and local governments throughout the consultation process.

According to CAF, the Museum precinct will essentially encompass the

Mr Gardner also said staff could carry on with confidence following the announcement. He believes the excision of the Museum and other heritage aspects from the freehold sale of Point Cook is proof the Air Force is serious about preserving its heritage.

CAF Air Marshal Angus Houston expressed his support for the Museum, saying it "was doing an excellent job in ensuring the preservation of vital aspects of our history and will continue to do so".

The RAAF Museum comprises 400,000 objects, 1 million photographs and 4 million negatives, making it the largest collection of material relating to Australia's rich military aviation history.

It boasts more than 100,000 visitors each year and more than 80 volunteers dedicated to the preservation of the Air Force's heritage.

buildings, hangars and aprons on the airfield side of Williams Road.

He said the majority of hangars and buildings within the precinct had the potential to be a showcase that would be open to the public in the future.

Through consolidating archives and using dedicated storage facilities at Laverton, the RAAF Museum will have

the room to expand its display area.

The RAAF Heritage Precinct will include the Sergeants' Mess, Sergeant accommodation buildings, the Australian Flying Corps memorial, the former Base Squadron headquarters, the flag pole, dais and the parade ground.

"Retention of many of the building in this precinct could well be justified on heritage grounds alone, however the intention is to continue to make use of them in support of the Australian Air Force Cadets," AIRMSHL Houston said. "This provides a very important link between our illustrious past and our bright future."

Minor refurbishment of some of these buildings will be necessary to meet OH&S requirements.

"Many of the old Bellman hangars, the cadets quarters, married quarters, workshops, stores sheds, the seaplane jetty and other historic assets in the areas to be sold will also be afforded protection by their inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register for the Point Cook RAAF Complex," AIRMSHL Houston said.

Point Cook's airfield will remain an operating airfield for both civilian use and for RAAF Museum historical flying displays.

A public information day will be held at Point Cook on Saturday, October 4, from 10am to 4pm. This is an opportunity for the public to review the project activity to date, the preliminary information regarding the sale process, the site's environment and heritage protection measures, and the State and local government planning controls.

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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

RADIO APPRENTICE SCHOOL



JOURNAL

1955

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Annual Journal - 1955

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LIST OF CONTENTS

Foreword by Commanding Officer	3	Courses— Radio Apprentice School, 1955	24-25
Radio Apprentice School Staff	4	Sir Ernest Fisk Scholarship Awards	26
The R.A.A.F. Apprentice (Radio) Scheme	5	My First Flight	27
What is an Apprentice?	6	"Bush-walk"— March, 1955	28
History of Royal Melbourne Technical College	7	History of "R.A.S. Review"	29
Annual Awards and Presentations	9	Unit Dances	30
Promotions— Apprentices, 1955	9	Ocean Grove Ramblings	31
Apprentice-ism	10	Hut 20	32
Cricket	11	My Home Town	33
Swimming	12	There's Much Moaning at R.A.S.	34
Ta Futball Match	13	Portsea Camp	35
Charge	13	An Apprentices' Beginning in Radio	36
Raising a Girl Friend	13	From Apprentice to Officer	37
Tennis	14	Aeromodellers Club	38
"Der Faillen Huffenpuffer"	15	Mediterranean Mission	39
R.A.S. Basketball	16	Apprentices Interests in Charity	41
The Last of the Washing Machines	17	Formal Dinners— Apprentices' Mess, 1955	41
Athletics	18	A Mistake	42
Domesticity	19	A Tale of Success	42
Football— Rugby	20	Bus Trips and Visits	43
A Message from "the Bish."	22	Important Events	44
The Message of Christmas	23	Honour Roll— Apprentices 1948-55	45



Squadron Leader R. A. Moore, Commanding Officer, Radio Apprentice School

Foreword

By Sqn. Ldr. R. A. MOORE

Commanding Officer Radio Apprentice School

This is the first issue of the Radio Apprentice School Annual Magazine and with its production those staff members — Apprentices and ex-Apprentices — whose enthusiasm and energy have made it possible will be able to look back with the satisfaction of knowing that by their association with its production they have carved for themselves the niche in posterity that is only afforded to pioneers.

They are the first.— nothing can ever take that honor from them — but I know that the challenge will be accepted and each succeeding issue will maintain the high standard that has been set in this the first issue.

Apprentices are now beginning to make their presence felt in the field where the increasingly complex electronic techniques set their own tempo and only those who have either the basic knowledge imparted during the comprehensive Apprentice Courses or the "know how" gained by years of practical experience can expect to dance to the tune.

The most valuable contributions to the Technical Branch occurred in February of this year when the nine members of No 1 Fellowship Diploma Course graduated and were commissioned. Their value to the service needs no comment. Their success should be an inspiration to all who have the ambition to fulfil to its highest degree the injunction of the school motto — "Prepare to Serve."

I wonder how many realise just what that motto means when translated into terms that have significance in this exciting age?

The modern counterparts of the great scientists of the past are going to launch a satellite that will hurtle round the earth at fantastic speeds and unfold for us the secrets of outer space.

This panic stricken meteor will be only another symbol of progress.

Whether the lessons learned will be used to add the knowledge of mankind which has made the desert blossom as a rose, or three blades of grass to grow where one grew before, is unfortunately not always in the hands of those whose discoveries make such things possible. The worlds of yesteryear are no longer bounded by the confines of the oceans and the mountain ranges.

Modern transport has made one world but until the ever improving lines of communication have brought the nations of the earth closer together and put a brake on the beastiality of human nature as exemplified by scientific warfare, we would be foolish to take refuge in the hope that the threat of the atom and "H" bombs will in itself be sufficient to dissuade a future maniac from precipitating yet another holocaust.

The time will come when the whole of the world's scientific effort can be directed towards "Utopia" but that time is not yet and in the interim all we can do is to be good scouts and "Prepare to Serve."

The Apprenticeship Scheme is just one tiny cog in the overall scheme of preparedness which has that aim. It is up to each of us to do our utmost to add to the efficiency of the Service by taking full advantage of the training afforded and at the same time fit ourselves for the peace and production which even in our time could be the antithesis of the two recent most horrible wars in history.

Those Apprentices who graduate with the Diplomas or Certificates of the Royal Melbourne Technical College will be well fitted to protect and serve the peace.

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Headquarters RAAF Butterworth

**Copy
of
Wing Commander Ted Ilton's
Outgoing Admin Staff Officer's
"Hand-Over/Take-Over"
"BRIEF"
to Incoming Admin S.O
Wing Commander Keith Manning
who had been delayed in Australia**

25th October 1974



ORGANISATION CHART
RAAF BASE
BUTTERWORTH
MALAYSIA
1972



A BRIEF

FOR

INCOMING

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF OFFICER

HEADQUARTERS RAAF

AIR BASE

BUTTERWORTH

COMPILED BY: WCCDR A.E. ILTON AFAM AIPMA
OCTOBER 1974

INDEX

<u>Serial</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Para Number</u>
1.	<u>INTRODUCTION:</u> Pre-Japanese Occupation (2) Japanese Occupation (3) Post-Japanese Occupation (4-7)	1 - 7
2.	<u>FIVE POWER ARRANGEMENTS:</u> HQFEAF/224 Group replaced by ANZUK (8-10) Air Component (11-12)	8 - 12
3.	<u>AIR COMPONENT - RAAF PARTICIPATION:</u> Role (13) Resources: (14A-H) No 3 Squadron No 75 Squadron Transport Support Flight No 478 Squadron Base Squadron No 4 RAAF Hospital Civilian Element	13 - 14
4.	<u>ASSOCIATED UNITS:</u> At Butterworth: (15A1-15A8) HQIADS RMAF RADAF Military Police Malaysian Army/Navy Malaysian Sick Quarters No 65 GL Section Australian Infantry Coy Group Away from Butterworth: (14B1-14B6) ANZUKHQ RAAFSUTG RAAFSAU ADA KL No 6 MIB Resident Malaysian Naval Officer	15
5.	<u>TOTAL COMPLEMENT AT BASE:</u>	16
6.	<u>JOINT USER ASPECTS:</u>	17 - 20
7.	<u>ASPECTS OF HQRAAFBUT:</u> Air Staff Eng Staff Equip Staff Legal Staff PRO Staff Financial Adviser Ground Liaison Officer Civilian Labour Office Administrative Staff	21 - 22

- 2 -

8.	<u>CIVILIAN LABOUR ADMINISTRATION:</u>	23 - 34
	Civilian Labour Office History	(23-24)
	The Agreement	(25-26)
	Union	(27)
	Defence Administrative Office	(28)
	Joint Consultative Council	(29)
	Joint Consultative Council Welfare Committee	(30)
	Recent Changes	(31)
	Future Plans	(32)
	Liaison with CIO/CSEU	(33)
	Outstanding Matters	(34)
9.	<u>GENERAL ITEMS OF INTEREST:</u>	35 - 96
	Movement of Executives	(36)
	Indulgence Administration	(37-38)
	Correspondence Files	(39)
	Duty Staff Roster	(40)
	Leave Outside Malaysia	(41)
	Transport Accident Reporting	(42-43)
	Review of Summary Punishments	(44)
	Directive to Officer Commanding	(45)
	Chrono Files	(46)
	Higher Duty Allowance	(47)
	Tour Elections	(48)
	Operation Picture	(49)
	RAAF OPI's Alor Star	(50)
	Formation Standing Orders	(51)
	RAAF Centre	(52-55)
	Snows Club	(55-57)
	Yacht Club	(58-60)
	Golf Club	(61)
	Other Clubs	(62)(63)
	Concerts	(64-65)
	Forms PP29	(66-70)
	ADMINSO's Conferences	(71-74)
	ADMINSO's Farewells	(75)
	Visits - RAAF	(76-78)
	Local Visitors	(79-80)
	RAAF School	(81-82)
	Standing Plans	(83)
	Ad Valorem	(84-85)
	Customs	(86-87)
	NAAFI	(88-89)
	RAAF Radio Butterworth	(90-93)
	Welfare	(94-95)
	WRVS and Red Cross	(96)

- ANNEXES:
- A. ANZUK Force - The Commonwealth Tri-National Military Presence in Singapore and Malaysia
 - B. Appointments HQIADS
 - C. Nominal Roll of HQBUT personnel.
 - C1. Nominal Roll of Asian Staff HQBUT.
 - D. Administrative Officers at RAAF at Butterworth.

- 3 -

- E. Role and Function of RAAF Centre.
- E1. Some notes on Entitled Users RAAF Centre.

INTRODUCTION

1. To set the scene concerning the Royal Australian Air Force presence here in North West Malaysia it may first be useful to know some of the background history.

Pre-Japanese Occupation of Base

2. Until the Japanese invaded this part of the Malaysian peninsula the airfield at Butterworth was run by the Royal Air Force. It was a relatively small organisation providing, primarily, refuelling facilities for RAF aircraft en route from Britain to Singapore.

Japanese Occupation of Base

3. During the period 1942-45, the Japanese used the airfield for air operations and developed the east-west airstrip (the north-south airstrip was to come later).

Post Japanese Occupation of Base

4. Immediately post-war the Royal Air Force resumed control until 1958 when the RAAF took over as part of the Strategic Reserve under the control of Headquarters Far East Air Force Singapore and within the organisation of 224 Group. The RAAF's No 5 ACS had been in situ at Butterworth from 1955 - 1958 building the 8000 ft North/South runway (which is almost twice as long as the old East-West) and associated hard-standings, taxi-ways buildings etc.

5. In July 1958 the first advance elements of the new RAAF Air Base Butterworth arrived followed quickly by the Sabres of No 3 and No 77 Squadron (forming 78 Wing), Canberras of No 2 Squadron and the associated units required to support these aircraft.

6. Sabres were changed to Mirages in 1965 and No 3 Squadron was replaced by 75 during 1967. No 3 Squadron returned re-equipped with Mirages in 1968.

7. Late in 1970 the Base was formally handed over to the control of the Royal Malaysian Air Force.

FIVE POWER ARRANGEMENTS

HQFEAF/NO 224 GROUP Replaced by ANZUK

8. As mentioned earlier the RAAF started its operations at Butterworth in 1958 as part of the Strategic Reserve within the aegis of HQFEAF and under the control of AOC 224 Group.

9. In 1971 a change to this previous concept was prompted by British withdrawals from the Far East. The setting up of the Five Power Arrangements resulted; the Powers concerned being Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malaysia and Singapore. The first three representing a Commonwealth Tri-National Force which was titled ANZUK, and is controlled by a 2 star officer titled Commander ANZUKFORCE, currently AVN R.G. Wakeford (RAF).

- 2 -

*

10. Some comprehensive notes on ANZUK are attached to this Brief at Annex A.

Air Component

11. The Air Component of ANZUK includes the RAAF elements at Butterworth and comes under the control of the Air Component Commander, COMANZUKAIR (currently Air Commodore J.I. Adams CBE, DFC, AFC RAAF).

12. ANZUK aircraft are assigned to a Five Power Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) as required for exercise and operational needs however, IADS is not part of ANZUK. Further comment on IADS is made in later paragraphs.

AIR COMPONENT - RAAF PARTICIPATION

Role

13. The role of the RAAF at Butterworth can be simply stated in broad terms as providing Air Defence to Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore as required by the Governments of those countries.

Resources

14. To meet the role at paragraph 13 the RAAF elements at Butterworth are:

- a. No 3 Squadron - establishment 19 Mirage Aircraft (one of which is a dual) 24 officers, 39 senior NCO's and 182 other ranks.
- b. No 75 Squadron - establishment 19 aircraft (one dual) 25 officers, 35 senior NCO's and 170 other ranks.

NB: 1. 3SQN's higher personnel establishment caters for an additional task to those assigned No 75 Squadron.

2. Each Squadron takes it in turn to provide a permanent detachment of 8 aircraft to Tengah for about six weeks at a time.

- c. Transport Support Flight (TSF) - establishment 6 Dakota aircraft, 2 Iroquois, 19 officers, 1 senior NCO and 8 other ranks.

NB: TSF provide transport support to the Mirage detachment at Tengah, to RAAFSAU in Indonesia and for ambassadorial tasking of our Australian Missions in Bangkok, Saigon, Vientiane, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta. TSF helicopters provide an SAR service for air operations at Butterworth as well as some tactical transport support.

/d. No 478

- 3 -

- d. No 478 Maintenance Squadron - established for providing 'E' servicings for Mirage aircraft and provision for and maintenance of all GSE and mechanical transport. The personnel establishment consists of 16 officers, 73 senior NCO's and 270 other ranks.
- e. Base Squadron Butterworth - in addition to providing the normal Base services BSBUT has the unique responsibility for:
- (1) administering over 1100 hirings/married quarters,
 - (2) co-ordinating with RAAF School Penang who, with a staff of about 46 teachers, teach some 1100 RAAF children between the ages of 5 and 14,
 - (3) co-ordinating transport requirements to convey 80% of the RAAF members to and from Penang Island each day (1000 +),
 - (4) administering a large RAAF Centre on Penang Island, and
 - (5) providing the services of a Radio Station to the local service community (on a strictly voluntary basis).
- f. No 4 RAAF Hospital - because Malaysian Conditions of Service provide for the dental and medical care of dependants it was necessary to establish a RAAF hospital here. Until recently this hospital provided a full-time RAF consultant Surgeon, Physician and Anaesthetist in addition to the obstetrics specialities and normal general practitioner commitments. The RAF have withdrawn their consultants and the posts are manned on an ad hoc basis from Australia by RAAF, RAAMC reservists and civilians for periods ranging from 2 weeks to 6 weeks. The personnel establishment of No 4 RAAF is 20 male officers, 23 RAAFNS, and 42 other ranks.
- g. HQBUT - provides the normal Base co-ordination Services, details of which will be shown in subsequent paragraphs.
- h. Civilian Element - in addition to the civilians contained in the large teaching staff, all who come from the Victorian and N.S.W. Education Department, there is APO Butterworth staffed by Commonwealth Public Servants headed by the APO, currently Mr Charles Thompson (who is also FA). There is also a division of the Australian Dept of Housing and Construction here. The Area Manager is Mr Reg Lodge, he has an Electrical Engineer Mr Stan Boorer and an Administrative Officer Mr Paul Hanssen. A large number of

/locally

- 4 -

locally engaged civilians are employed on the Base, approx. 1500. This element is administered by a Civilian Labour Office which is dealt with in more detail later in these notes.

ASSOCIATED UNITS

15. There are a number of other units at Butterworth and away from Butterworth which go to make up the whole picture. They are, (not necessarily shown in order of operational importance), as follows:

a. At Butterworth

- (1) HQIADS - this is the Headquarters of the Five Power Integrated Air Defence System - located within the boundaries of Air Base Butterworth but not under either RAAF or RMAF control but controlled by a Joint Malaysian-Singaporean Air Council. HQIADS is headed by an Australian 2 star officer, currently AVM R.T. Susans CBE, DSO, DFC. He has a staff of 14 officers representing the five powers involved (see Annex B). The current role of IADS is to co-ordinate the Air Defence Forces of the Governments of Malaysia and Singapore and the Air Defence component of ANZUK.
- (2) RMAF. The Royal Malaysian Air Force which controls the Air Base at Butterworth is commanded by an RMAF Lieut. Col. His organisation is based along RAF lines ie. Flying Wing, Supply Wing, Engineering Wing and an Admin Wing. His Flying Wing is split into two squadrons - No 3, Sabres and No 11 Alouettes Helicopters. An addition of 14 F5E's is expected to be made to their aircraft inventory progressively thru 1975 starting with two F5E trainers in about next March. In addition to the foregoing, No 1 Air Defence Centre (1ADC) (RMAF) is based at Butterworth to provide radar cover for North West Malaysia. An RAAF Flight Lieutenant is the Operations Officer of this unit. He is on loan to the RMAF.
- (3) RADAF. This unit's full title is Royal Australian Air Force Air Defence Advisory Flight. It was set up here in 1971 to provide instruction, guidance and support to the RMAF's Air Defence Controller training programme. RADAF personnel monitor the day-to-day activities of 1ADC personnel. To provide this assistance RADAF is staffed with 5 RAAF Officers and 5 NCO's. Current OIC is FLTLT Don Rudkin. The commitment is expected to continue at least thru 1976 with some dropping-off of the NCO commitment during 1975.

/(4) Military

- 5 -

- (4) Military Police. The Malaysians provide a significant Military Police element at Air Base Butterworth - (POLIS TERTARA) - they number about 200 and in the main look after physical base security. They work in very well indeed with our Provost Flight.
- (5) Army/Navy. Small elements of Malaysian Army (in addition to the Military Police) operate on the Base from time to time. Also, there is a permanent Malaysian Naval Maintenance Depot based on the southern side of the old East/West Air Strip.
- (6) Malaysian Sick Quarters. A small Malaysian Hospital is situated near the Naval Depot. Additionally some spare ward space at No 4 RAAF Hospital was recently allotted to the RMAF for dependant medical care.
- (7) No 65 GL Section. This is a small Australian Army Detachment consisting of a Major and a Sergeant (situated at eastern end of FHQ) - it provides the usual Ground Liaison type service.
- (8) Company Group. An Australian Infantry Company (of about 130 men) is on permanent deployment to Air Base Butterworth. It changes over every 3 months - is usually commanded by a Major (title OC - RAR Company Group) and is situated on the southern side of the Base near the south gate. In addition to its normal training tasks associated with the deployment of troops overseas the Company Group provides assistance to the OC in the protection of Australian assets property and personnel at Air Base Butterworth.

b. Away from Butterworth

- (1) ANZUKHQ - although currently in existence at Singapore this HQ will have disbanded by 16th December 1974 - each of the three nations having assumed their own National identity, there currently is a NZHQ and an UKHQ in Singapore. It is expected that the Australian National HQ will transfer to Butterworth with the OC Butterworth wearing the hat of the National Military Head in this part of the world.
- (2) RAAFSUTG - meaning RAAF Support Unit Tengah - is a small self-accounting unit at Tengah with an establishment of 10 officers, 7 senior NCO's and 15 other ranks. The unit is commanded by a Wing Commander GD, currently WGCER John (Ball) Pratt. Their role is to provide support for the permanent RAAF Mirage Detachment. Until now this unit has not been under command of OCBUT but has reported direct

/to Air

- 6 -

to Air Office. This will probably continue except that if OCBUT becomes National Service head in this part of the world CO RAAFSUTG will be required to consult OCBUT on appropriate matters.

- (3) RAAFSAU - RAAF Sabre Advisory Unit was set-up in Indonesia at Ishwayudi on 1st October 1972 to assist the Indonesian Air Force in introducing the Sabres which were presented to them by the Australian Government. The unit is commanded by SQNLDR Alan Page and has a staff of 5 officers, 10 senior NCO's and 14 other ranks. The unit is rationed and salaried from here - to effect this we send a TSF Dakota to Ishwayudi each Thursday. We have no direct supervisory responsibility for the unit, this being handled by our Air Attache in Jakarta (currently GPCAPT Meldrum who will be replaced at end of year by GPCAPT P. Reed). However, we do send a Chaplain and our Legal Staff Officer on liaison visits 3 or 4 times per year.
- (4) ADA Kuala Lumpur. The Australian Defence Adviser Kuala Lumpur is GPCAPT J. Whitehead assisted by Lieut. Col. Tan Roberts. We have considerable dialogue with his office from time to time on liaison matters concerning any RAAF co-operation with Malaysian Ministry of Defence. (This has included discussions on our use of the Australian Army Company Group based at Butterworth). In addition considerable consular support is constantly required from the High Commission in Kuala Lumpur for passports, marriage matters, naturalisation problems etc.
- (5) No GMB - this is the Malaysian Army Infantry Brigade at Sungai Petani (about 28 Kilometres north of here) - our GIO has regular contact with this unit as too does our SGRDEFO, SPROVO, and OC of the Coy Group. We are situated in their area of operational responsibility.
- (6) Resident Royal Malaysian Naval Officer. In addition to the Naval element mentioned at paragraph 15 a.(5) there is a small naval Barracks on Penang Island at Swettenham Pier. This is commanded by a Malaysian Naval Captain (equivalent to an RAN Lieut) who from time to time contacts us concerning social-sporting events for crews of visiting Naval vessels.

b. The total complement at the Base in round figures would be:

- a. Australians in Uniform - 1550
- b. Locally Engaged Civilians - 1300*

/c. Malaysian

- 7 -

c. Malaysian Armed Forces - 700

- * This figure does not include Cooks and Amahs - these are employed by individual members on a ratio of 1 amah (or cook/amah) for all ranks up to and including SQNLDR, 1 cook and 1 amah for WCCDRs and GPCAPT's and 1 cook 2 amahs for AIRCDREs and above.

JOINT USER ASPECTS

17. Generally speaking, the Malaysian Components at the Air Base are self sufficient. Major exceptions being the following which are still provided by the RAAF:

- a. Air Traffic Control
- b. Fire Crew
- c. *Officers and *Sergeants Messes
- d. Postal
- e. Hygiene
- f. Garbage disposal
- g. Astra Cinema
- h. Air Movements Centre

- * In respect of Officers and Sergeants Messes, Malaysians are represented on the Committees and are encouraged to take an active role in the management of the Mess. Currently the PMC and CMC respectively are appointed by OC BUT from Australians. However, two deputy PMC/CMC's are appointed ie. one Australian and one Malaysian to each Mess.

18. There are a considerable number of joint/use cost/shared aspects on the Base on which Financial Adviser and/or CO Base Squadron can provide information.

19. Amongst the various Clubs on the Base that were started when it was RAAF Base Butterworth ie. Yacht Club, Golf Club, Motor Club, Scuba Club etc these are still RAAF managed and controlled. However membership is open to all servicemen on the Base. Despite this there is still only a sprinkling of Malaysian membership in these Clubs.

20. The important thing to remember is that the Australian element at Air Base Butterworth is now only a tenant. The Base is a Malaysian Air Force Base under the Command of the RMAF Base Commander. It is to be noted however that OC RAAF Butterworth is the Ground Defence Commander for Air Base Butterworth.

/ASPECTS OF

- 8 -

ASPECTS OF
HEADQUARTERS RAAF
AIR BASE BUTTERWORTH

21. To assist the OC in exercising his RAAF Command he has the following Headquarters staff:

a. Air Staff

- (1) ASO - GPCAPT L.R. Klaffer AFC
- (2) AIR 1 - SQNLDR Mat Leahy (due in DEC74 from 3SQN)
- (3) AIR 11 - FLTLT Chris Mills
- (4) AIR 111 - SQNLDR Les Stapleton (due in JAN75)

b. Eng Staff - GPCAPT J.K. Henze is Engineering Staff Officer (Base Engineering Officer) but operates from his office as CO 478 Squadron.

c. Equipment Staff - WCCDR K. O'Brien as well as being Senior Equipment Officer Base Squadron is Equipment Staff Officer. However, he performs this latter function from his office in Base Squadron Headquarters.

d. Legal Staff. Until the Estab review of Sep 1973 the Legal Staff consisted of a Squadron Leader and a Flight Lieutenant (necessary in days of Vietnam). The establishment now is 1 and this post is occupied by A/SQNLDR Graeme Pound (promotee 1JAN75).

e. PRO Staff. This staff consists of 1 only and suffered a recent (DEC73) rank reduction from Squadron Leader to Flight Lieutenant (on our prompting). Current incumbent is FLTLT Les Edwards - on PTD from N.S.W. Dept of Agriculture with an almost two decade background of Air Training Corps service. As the PRO cell at ANZUK dries up at end of '74 our PRO assumes a new title as Joint Services PRO. A new duty statement is expected from Defence together with a likely upgrading of the post to Squadron Leader.

f. Financial Adviser. As mentioned at paragraph 14 (h) - Mr Charles Thompson currently is the Financial Adviser. He is expecting to be replaced JAN/FEB75. You should have a long talk to him about his function here before he leaves. (His financial delegations are contained in F 1/2 Annex H).

g. Ground Liaison Officer. Currently Major Charles Miller and SGT Bell both of whom are to be replaced at end of 1974. The GLO reports direct to OC. He is our liaison officer for all Army matters.

- 9 -

I have encouraged him to feed his admin matters through me - this has been mutually beneficial. He works in closely with AIR III and SPROVO on appropriate matters and visits GMLB (see paragraph 15 (b) 5) on a regular basis.

- h. Civilian Labour Office - headed by Mr Brian Pobjoy as CLO - he has an assistant Mr Mike Collins. This section is subject to a little more detail at paragraph 23 to 34 of this brief.
- i. Administrative Staff - headed by ADMINSO there is:
- (1) ADMINO - FIGOFF Maurie Meechan who *arrived* on 22JAN74, due out in JUL76.
 - (2) WOD - WOFF J. Barratt arrived 10APR73 due out APR75.
 - (3) O/R WOFF - WOFF W. May arrived DEC73 due out DEC75.
 - (4) SGT CLKA - SGT K. Blowers arrived AUG72 and due out FEB75.
 - (5) LAC CLK - LAC M.K. Driesener arrived JAN74 and due out JUL76.
 - (6) PA/OC - this is a European civilian post traditionally filled by a suitably qualified wife of an airman. Currently Mrs Elizabeth Darby - her husband is an LAC in 3SQN due out in FEB75. Her duties are basically Confidential Secretary to OC and classified steno/typist to HQ officers.
 - (7) Asian Staff - this consists of two Clerks General (Robert and Sammy), a stenographer (Miss Choong Say Boo) who is thoroughly reliable and extremely competent and hard-working and three general-hand-type-employees (Krishnan, Lee and Sand).

22. Some further details of Headquarters Staff are shown at Annex C. It should be noted that included on this list are 1ADS and RADAF personnel who are on strength of HQBUT for administrative purposes.

CIVILIAN LABOUR ADMINISTRATION

Civilian Labour Office

23. History. There have been large numbers of indigenous personnel (LEC's) employed at this Base since the early days of the RAF here. The RAAF took over their control in 1958 and the Civilian Labour Office was run by an RAAF Civilian Labour Officer (CLO) who controlled all LEC's including domestic

/servants.

- 10 -

servants. In the mid-60's unionism started to awaken and the LEC's at Butterworth became part of the War Department Civilian Staff Association which had sections throughout Malaya/Singapore. This prompted a change in our organisation whereby the RAAF CIO was replaced by a Commonwealth Public Servant. Domestic Servants (who still are not Unionists) became individual responsibility of members.

24. CIO. The CIO is responsible to the OC for the administration of all civilian labour employed by the Department of Defence in West Malaysia (see FSO 3/A/13).

2

The Agreement

25. To provide day to day guide lines for (the CIO in particular) administration of our civil labour force, (which excludes domestic servants such as cooks and amahs) an Agreement was drawn up in 1970 between the Australian Government (Department of Defence) and what was then known as the War Department Civilian Staff Association. The full title of the Agreement being: "The Department of Defence (Commonwealth of Australia) West Malaysia Employees Agreement 1970". (A copy is in top drawer of ADMINSO's filing cabinet in a red spring back folder and you should digest this at the earliest). It should be noted that members of our Asian civil labour force are known as "Locally Engaged Civilians" or LEC's.

26. This Agreement is the CIO's "Bible" - his copy is more fully amended than mine. (Current investigations are being undertaken to up-date the "Agreement" - CIO will advise you on this).

Administrative Machinery

27. Union. This leads to the Staff Association (or Union), the original name as shown in paragraph 23 has been changed to Commonwealth Services Employees Union (CSEU). Their Secretary Mr NG Ah Keat has an office adjacent to CIO's office. He is not an LEC and he spends each afternoon in his office on the Base. He and CIO have daily associations. (You should read the appropriate files in the 1229 block which are kept in top drawer of filing cabinet in ADMINSO's office also have a long talk to Brian Pobjoy at earliest).

28. DAO. Until now, the Defence Department representations on civil labour matters have been administered by the Australian Defence Administration Office in Singapore - (DAO) - current Head of DAO is Mr Hec Walker - he has on his staff an Industrial Relations Officer (Malaysia) a Mr Mike Jopling. CIO has direct liaison with DAO either by 'phone, letter or personal visit when he needs in-country guidance, support or decision on LEC matters in dispute.

29. JCC. The JCC - Joint Consultative Council - was established to negotiate matters coming within the scope of the "Agreement" and to arrive at mutually agreed changes where appropriate in the "Agreement" and to discuss other matters relating to pay and conditions of employment. Membership of the JCC comprises eight - four from Management and four from Staff Side. The past practice has been that Management has been represented by 3 officers from DAO and the CIO and the Staff side represented by the President of CSEU Mr Zaidi (also Secretary General of Malaysian Trade Union Congress, MTUC) Secretary of CSEU (NG Ah Keat) and two members of CSEU Executive Council. A recent practice has developed where ADMINSO has attended JCC meetings in an advisory/observer role. Meetings are held at least 3 times per year with annual

/meetings

- 11 -

meetings held as near as possible to April each year.

30. JCC Welfare Committee. The concept of this Committee is to:

- a. develop a closer personal contact between civilians themselves and between locally engaged employees and management,
- b. to incorporate and promote sports and other recreational activities and staff training and education, and
- c. to bring to attention matters connected with the improvement of efficiency of canteen etc facilities.

The financial source of this Committee is from the Civilian Canteen Contractor who pays M\$300 per month to Welfare. A read of the files and discussions with CLO will quickly show you that Management is not satisfied with the history of this Committee; as Vice Chairman, this, I believe, will be one of your early tasks for rationalisation. There is too much involved to attempt to brief you here. However a read of file 1229/6/P3 will give you an insight and prepare you for discussions with CLO. (My broad criticism is that its administration, particularly meetings, should be more strictly controlled ie. along normal lines of resolutions, voting etc and that meetings must be held regularly).

31. Recent Changes:

- a. JCC. With the planned run-down of ANZUK in Singapore and the consequential effects on the DAO element, two of the regular DAO reps on the JCC, Messrs Hitchman (Chairman JCC) and Henderson returned to Australia in December last. For the two JCC meetings held this year Mr Hitchman has travelled to Kuala Lumpur and Butterworth from Australia to chair the meetings. He will be here again late November for the final JCC meeting for 1974. (The interesting aspect about this is that Tony Hitchman is now completely removed from the DAO/CLO type scene - he is now part of the Committee enquiring into Defence Forces pay). Although the JCC has continued to operate in this way it has left a lot to be desired both from local management and CSEU viewpoints. Some better arrangement is hoped for in 1975.
- b. JCC Welfare. The imminent "demise" of DAO functions in Singapore has also had its effect on the JCC Welfare Committee. Formerly the Chairman was Mr Henderson from DAO's office - on his return to Australia (without replacement) the Chairman's position was transferred to CLO.

32. Future Plans. It seems certain to me that a residual element of the DAO function will have to remain in the region for as long as we retain Australian elements here. Accordingly I foresee a DAO office being set up at Butterworth with 2 or 3 Defence civilians, one of whom, hopefully, will become Chairman of JCC. Already we have been advised, informally, that

/Mr Mike

- 12 -

Mr Mike Jopling will move from Singapore to Butterworth towards end of this year to provide locally the necessary Industrial Relations expertise which has come from him at DAC Singapore in the past. There will be a need for some suitable accommodation however this cannot be arranged until the size of the commitment is known. I strongly advise your inclusion as a formal member of the JCC and some urgent revision of the JCC Welfare Management. With a 'new DAC' office at Butterworth this may be a relatively simple matter.

33. Liaison with CIO/CSEU. I cannot stress strongly enough that you, as ADMINSO, are looked upon as the uniformed management representative for cordial/harmonious industrial relations. A strong rapport with both you, CIO and Secretary CSEU is essential. It will take a month or two for you to acquire the necessary 'feel', this perhaps can be expedited by a read and re-read of the files in the top drawer.

34. Outstanding Matters. The two main items which still required resolution when I left were:

- a. JCC. Placing of all non-essential Saturday morning IEC's on to a 5 day week instead of 5½. However this should have been resolved by the time you arrive (folio 12 on 1229/12/P3 will provide you with a suitable reference point).
- b. JCC Welfare - a rice subsidy scheme has been proposed by Sec CSEU - it has been going now for nearly 12 months (see folios 51 & 52 et seq on file 1229/6/P3). When you've read the history you will have perceived some of the difficulties. At the time of writing this brief OC had written back to Sec CSEU with a series of questions (folio 82 1229/6/P3).

GENERAL ITEMS OF INTEREST

35. The following items which I will group under side-headings are matters which I would have discussed in an oral brief with you. I have not attempted to list them in any particular order of importance, neither will I expound at any length on them. Hopefully they will provide a useful aide Memoire during the period you are settling into the Chair.

Movement of Executives

36. As far as can be established the situation on Base executive tenure as at 1 Jan 75 should be:

- a. OC - will have completed two years three months and is expected will remain until end of 1975.
- b. ASO - GPCAPT Klaffer has been here 12 months (he is also PMC wef OCT74).
- c. FA - Charles Thompson will be replaced about Feb 75.

/d. COBS

- 13 -

- d. COBS. - GPCAPT Smyth will have completed 2 years (early Feb 75) and could remain until at least Aug 75 or even end of year.
- e. CO 75SQN - WCCDR Hans Roser will have been here 12 months. (Also President Golf Club).
- f. CO 3SQN - WCCDR Dave Owens (here 12 months SQNLDR as OPSO) will probably leave at end of 1975.
- g. CO TSF - SQNLDR Don Stott will have been here about 14 months.
- h. CO 478 - GPCAPT Hense will have been here 12 months.
- i. CO 4HOSP - WCCDR Don Smyth arrives JAN75.
- j. SECO - WCCDR Keith O'Brien arrived DEC72 - could leave mid-75 or late 75 (also D/PMC RAAF).
- k. SADMINO - WCCDR Thad Leach arrived SEP73 - probably return end 1975.
- l. ADMINO's - See separate list at Annex D.

Indulgence Administration (File 2107/5/Eq)
 ABC A 4/11
 AAP 873

37. This is no doubt one of the most time consuming tasks which will confront you almost daily. A consolidation of some of the history is in the top drawer (left) of your desk. It is too big a subject to discuss in this brief. A recent minute I wrote to OC on file 2107/21/Eq at folio 136 will give you some background. Suffice it to say Air Office is applying the ground rules more stringently than ever, other than for clear-cut compassionate cases. I had hoped to write a paper on the subject the theme being - "no cost to Commonwealth - seats available - Admin machinery already in existence etc" however time beat me. (A recent Personnel Magazine article hasn't helped the situation because it suggested that indulgence travel was a breeze!) A register is kept in the O/Room, Maurie Meecham is reasonably full-bottle on the subject now, and I always refer 'curly' ones to the OC.

38. What is needed soon is a review of all Indulgence files to try and straighten out a chronology of Indulgence policy.

Correspondence Files

39. A file survey is long-overdue, some of the problems being:

- a. to close off "Confidential" file covers where "In-Confidence" is more appropriate,
- b. peruse files for policy matters which are recorded on action files, and

/c. determine

- 14 -

c. determine need for Board of Survey.

The ADMINO has a plan to have this task looked at during the period of reduced activity 6th Dec - 6th Jan so maybe it will be well under way when you arrive.

Duty Staff Officer Roster

40. This is maintained by ADMINO for all WGCDRs and SQNLDRs - mid-week (two days at a time) week-end (Friday morning to Monday morning) oncoming and off-going report to ADMINO for instructions - I manage this latter aspect from my Diary.

Leave Outside Malaysia

41. ADMINO signs on behalf of OC. For leave to Thailand particularly by road I always endorse "Approved subject to provisions of FRO 100/74" (or current FRO at time) because there are only a few routes which we allow members to use when driving a vehicle.

Transport Accident Reporting (Form A184)

42. These reports come to this HQ from units and are then processed on a standard loose minute proforma by LSO. I introduced this system in an attempt to reduce the time lag in processing.

43. There currently is a Claims Office at ANZUK HQ who have in the past been our "local" administering authority for claims from civilians arising out of RAAF M/T accidents (also flying accidents). It is expected that this "Claims Office" responsibility will be transferred to Butterworth in 1975.

Review of Summary Punishments (RP10)

44. LSO prepares a minute to OC (thru ADMINO) for these Reviews.

Directive to Officer Commanding

45. See the background to this on file 3/5/Air - current Directive is at folio 22. Ask LSO for some briefing. A new Directive will no doubt be issued to OC on the demise of ANZUK on 16 Dec 74.

Chrono Files

46. Each unit submits a chrono file to FHQ on a regular basis in a similar way to other Bases. As well as serving ^{as} a means of keeping FHQ informed it provides a means for checking for administrative procedures and putting a quick brake on any direct comms with Air Office which required clearance (or an input) from FHQ.

Higher Duty Allowance

47. FHQ Butterworth assumes a normal Command HQ responsibility for HDA, most of the leg-work is done by the ADMINO.

/Four

- 15 -

Tour Elections

48. Although the basic tour is 2 years, manning flexibility is provided by permitting members to elect periods from 2 to 2½ years. This is done at the six month point after arrival and is administered in a master roll by BSBUT. A separate Master Roll is maintained for Mirage trained airmen - suggest you discuss this with ADMINO 478SQN. Extensions of tour beyond 2½ years are only considered if prompted by strong compassionate grounds, or a service requirement.

Operation Picture

49. Although this side heading is not self-explanatory it concerns a Community Relations project sponsored by Department of Defence. Its other title is 'RAAF Special Assistance Project'. Briefly, an amount of about 10 to 12 thousand dollars Aust is allotted to us annually (through Australian High Commission KL) to disperse to worthy causes in the Butterworth/Penang Community. FA and ADMINCO administer the fund on behalf of OC - it is usually dispersed in equipment of various kinds to schools, associations, homes for the aged etc. The Institution concerned approaches us with details of their requirements, if we approve, they purchase the items (usually about M\$500) then send us the bill. We then make a bit of a PR effort about the occasion by having officers (WCCDR or above) making the official presentation. Suggest you discuss with FA and read the file - 12/27/10/Air.

RAAF QFI's Alor Star

50. The RMAF equivalent to our FTS is at Alor Star (about 130 kilometres north of here). For the last two years their shortage of QFI's has been supplemented by three RAAF QFI's on loan. The three current QFI's (who are married) arrived in Jan 73 and will be progressively changed over from Jan 75 - May (Jun) 75 by a further 3 RAAF officers. The RMAF provide first class accommodation in a new block of flats adjacent (4 kilometres) from airfield. Base Squadron (SADMINO) provides administrative backing and I suggest you read both our files () and BSBUT file () on the subject.

Formation Standing Orders

51. I have been intending to accomplish the task of reproducing FSO's in the new international paper size but before so doing to progressively read through and amend. Alas, this has not advanced very far. LSC and ADMINO may be able to help with this task.

RAAF Centre

52. As indicated at paragraph 14 (e)(4) BSBUT has the task of administering a large RAAF Centre on Penang Island. Briefly, it provides three most essential services:

- a. an administrative centre on Penang Island for Medical, Dental, Housing Section, Provost, Chaplaincy, Post Office, etc.
- b. a recreational centre for WOFF's and below and their dependents, (with some exceptions for officers and dependants) and
- c. a leave centre for Commonwealth servicemen and their dependents (again, WOFF's and below).

- 15 -

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- c. a leave centre for Commonwealth servicemen and their dependents (again, WOFP's and below).

- 16 -

53. The OIC comes from the ADMIN2 post in BSBUT and day-to-day supervision is provided by a WOFF and FSGT CLK ADMIN.

54. FLT/LT Terry Challender is the current OIC - he leaves on posting in mid-Jan so try and have a 'famil' discussion/visit with him before he leaves.

55. Some notes on the Centre are at Annex .

Snows Club

Al 55. The derivation of the title is from 'Senior NCO's Club'. Although not officially recognised as a Club it is condoned by Management.

56. It is a rented house not far from RAAF Centre and is run along similar lines to a Sergeants Mess (including membership).

57. Suggest you have a talk to WOFF Edwards, WOD BSBUT about this Club.

Yacht Club

58. Has something of an infamous history here and there!! Is situated on the beach behind the Dog Section - commonly known as 'the Boatie'. Quite a wealthy Club. If it were to be called the Power Boat Club it would be more appropriate.

59. Membership open to all ranks on the Base but used mainly by un-accompanied and single airmen.

60. The current Commodore (OIC) is FLT/LT Alan Hedges (ATC BSBUT) who seems to be running a 'tight-ship'.

Golf Club

61. Could be described as one of our best single morale boosting assets. It certainly provides a catalyst to the married members on the mainland. It is also used by a significant number of airmen who live on Pensang Island. WCCDR Hans Roser assumes post of President on 4 Nov 74.

Other Clubs

62. The other main Clubs on the Base include:

- a. Wives Club (RAAF AFWA) - new President is Mrs Leach;
- b. Dolphins Club - an amateur swimming Club mainly for kids on the mainland;
- c. Scuba Club;
- d. Motor Club.

and many others but smaller in membership.

63. About the best way to get an insight into the various Clubs is to peruse a monthly Welfare Financial Statement - the total financial turn-over is quite staggering. Also call for their minute books from time to time.

- 17 -

Concerts

64. We have Concert Parties visit here from Australia about three times per year (the last was 19th October). They travel by service aircraft and usually provide two performances - one at RAAF Centre and one at Base Cinema.

65. The PRO is the Liaison Officer for these concerts - he will give you some background.

Forms P/P29

66. I maintain a progress register (in bottom drawer of ADMINO's cabinet) for 29's.

67. ADMINO/Personnel Clerk maintain a P/P29 B/F register.

68. A circulation sheet has also been devised which has proved useful.

69. Because of our mailing distance from Australia (11 to 25 days - using air mail - is not unusual) we need to emphasise a reasonable lead-time.

70. Chain of reporting is also in bottom drawer (I used the bottom drawer exclusively for P/P29 matters).

ADMINO's Conferences

71. Late last year I started monthly ADMINO's conferences - usually third or last Friday in month.

72. My habit has been for them to last from 1100-1145 followed by a few 'light refreshments' in Cocktail Bar at Officers Mess with all ADMINO's then having lunch together. I have stressed the importance from the outset of being back on the job by 1300.

73. You may consider that 1100-1300 is not enough? However, regardless of how much extra time is allotted, it would still be insufficient. At least 2 hours per month strengthens rapport and for this reason alone is most useful.

74. Suggest you read the file on the subject which is .

ADMINO Farewells

75. We also have a system where all ADMINO's and their wives go out to dinner to farewell a colleague. The first was last June and it proved most successful.

Visits - RAAF

76. A lot of our time here is devoted to organising visits of various staff officers, Board Members, Parliamentarians etc. Those that are essentially RAAF in flavour do not affect the RAAF. However, as we are tenants here it is a most important courtesy to include the RAAF Base Commander as a distributee to our visit programmes and on the guest list for luncheons etc.

77. Generally, the leg-work for each visit programme is done by the ADMINO. Guest lists for luncheons are devised in consultation with CC. As a rule of thumb, the guest list is restricted to CC, IMC, ASO and unit

- 18 -

CO's. If the visitor has a certain speciality, then the senior unit specialist is invited, e.g. AMSE would prompt an invite to SEQO, PROVM would prompt SPROVO etc. Similarly, the co-ordinating officer for the visit would be an appropriate senior unit specialist.

78. Suggest you read any visit file to get a 'local feel'.

Local Visitors

79. Because we used to run the Base there is still a tendency for local schools, organisations etc to write to OC RAAF requesting approval for visit to see various aspects of the Base.

80. As the Base is now an RMAF responsibility, these requests are forwarded by us to OC ADMIN WING RMAF for his acknowledgement to the requesting body and for subsequent arrangement of visit.

RAAF School

81. As you will note at paragraph 14(e)(2) we run a large school on Penang Island. Naturally, the Principal has direct access back to his administering body in Australia, however, an effective RAAF liaison is also an important part of the school administration. Accordingly, the SEDO, SQUADRON Paul Rasmussen is School Liaison Officer. Suggest you have an early briefing session with him.

82. I commend that you arrange for an early visit to the School as soon after it resumes in February as possible. The Principal - Mr Jack Walsh (entering his 3rd year) will welcome your visit.

Standing Plans

83. There are a number of standing plans that are necessary for this Base viz:

- a. Base Recall Plan;
- b. Shared Defence;
- c. Families Protection Plan,

the names make the content self-evident. Copies are in the top drawer of the Admin SO's safe and, again, I commend your early attention to these matters for reading and inward digestion.

Ad Valorem

84. Ad Valorem concerns an exemption from duty concession which is made available to Australians serving at Butterworth. Briefly it means a substantial saving on a new vehicle which is purchased for subsequent export by the purchaser to Australia. The normal requirement is that the vehicle should be purchased within three months of arrival.

85. There has been some recent static arising out of abuses of the privilege. Our administrative systems have tightened as a result. LSO will give you the files to read.

Customs

86. Although you may have heard talk of Penang no longer being a free

- 19 -

port there is still a large Customs organisation at Butterworth. All vehicles and passengers travelling from Penang to Butterworth can be subjected to search at the Butterworth ferry terminal. We are treated most courteously by the Customs Officers and we tend to jump very hard on offenders because we do not wish any privileges to be prejudiced.

87. This leads to the question of duty free beer. The best way to catch up on this matter is to read file 12/8/Air.

NAAFI

88. There are four NAAFI shops available for our use - two on the married patch, one at the Airmen's Club and one in one of our larger hiring areas in Jalan Gajah Penang.

89. Although criticisms are levelled at NAAFI by disgruntled customers from time to time - NAAFI generally provide a good service with courteous attention and competitive prices. Use of the NAAFI service is restricted to servicemen and dependants and supporting Australian elements (NAAFI beer is an exception) LSO will brief you further on NAAFI generally.

RAAF Radio Butterworth

90. This is an entirely volunteer-staff organisation with the exception of a paid Secretary.

91. Official assistance is provided by maintenance backing from Telecom Flight and financial backing from Welfare.

92. The OIC is SQNLDR John Connell - SERENO 7550N - see him about a family tour.

93. Similar to the Golf Club it also is one of our greatest morale boosting assets. And, despite its volunteer staff it provides a most professional entertainment and communication service.

Welfare

94. Because of the size and extent of the Club's at this Base, the Unit Welfare is responsible for large financial undertakings and control.

95. WCCDR Thad Leach is Chairman of Welfare. Suggest you have an early discussion with him and perhaps a perusal of the Welfare Minute Book.

WRVS and Red Cross

96. Two civilian elements at this Base which are perhaps unusual are; Womens Royal Volunteer Service and the Australian Red Cross. The former is an English lady, Mrs Joan White, who operates out of the Airman's Club as a 'Welfare Officer', 'Social Worker', 'Mother Confessor' etc. etc. and is a complete tower of strength to all living-in Airmen. She could best be described as 'a real honey' and 'worth her weight in gold'. The Red Cross representative is Miss Katherine Sutton - she works out of No 4 RAAF Hospital and provides the usual type occupational therapy that Red Cross provides to hospital in-patients. Both ladies live in the Officers Mess.

CONCLUSION

97. The foregoing ninety-six paragraphs may help to fill the

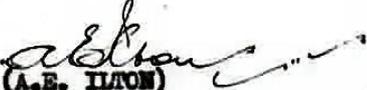
- 28 -

vacuum which results from the absence of a hand/over take/over. It does not attempt to be exclusive or exhaustive. There are no doubt many items which I have overlooked or omitted. However, this brief will be quickly supplemented by day-to-day experience and no doubt will soon be put aside.

RECOMMENDATION

98. Have an enjoyable and profitable tour at RAAF Air Base Butterworth, the most interesting Base on which I have had the privilege to serve.

25 Oct 74


(A.E. ILTON)
Wing Commander
Administrative Staff Officer

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