

Appy Reunion.

On the one fine day in Melbourne on Saturday 21st January 2012, 76 RAAF Ex-Apprentices got together to celebrate the scheme, to meet up with old mates, to share a few drinks and to just enjoy each other's company and reminisce that wonderful time they had while in the RAAF.

They met at the Werribee RSL, not far from Laverton and Point Cook and this year was the 39th time they had got together. People came from all parts of Australia and from New Zealand to celebrate the event which was organised by Phil "Dick" Tracy, an Oyster off 13 intake at Wagga and who is the Secretary of the Melbourne RAAF Ex-Apprentice Committee. Next year will be the 40th reunion – make sure you put that in your diary, it is guaranteed to be a biggy. The reunion is held in Victoria around the Australia Day weekend for all ex-apprentices and staff. Next year there will also be a family day on the Sunday out at [Toolangi](#) in the hills to the north of Melbourne.

The 5 blokes below were all on 14 Radio Appy which started at Frognall on the 8th February, 1960. In January 1961, with the start of the RAAF's Diploma Cadet Squadron and the Comms department expanding, Frognall was becoming a bit overcrowded, so the Radio Appies left the Camberwell Palace and moved out to the base at Laverton. Radschool at Ballarat was closed shortly thereafter, (May 1961) and it also moved down to Laverton and the Applies were incorporated into Radschool as a separate Squadron. After a total of two years at Melbourne Tech College and eight months equipment training at Laverton, these blokes graduated on the 15th Aug 1962.



The Radio Apprenticeship scheme started in 1948, at Frognall, moved to Laverton in 1961 and finally closed in 1992.

Ian Guthrie was with the RNZAF which had arranged to have their Appies trained in Australia and continued to send their young lads over to Australia to be trained until 1981. Prior to this, the RNZAF brats had been trained in the UK with the RAF. The Kiwi blokes probably weren't all that happy about the change – missing out on a 3 year holiday in the UK.

In 1961, Ian was the Victorian Apprentice of the year, an honour which was awarded by the Victorian Apprenticeship Commission. He was also the first Radio Appy to reach the rank of W/Off Appy and was the first RNZAF member to lead a RAAF radio apprentices' graduation parade.

Must be something in the water over there.....

The Engineer Apprentices scheme, which was based at Wagga, was commenced in 1948 and it too was regrettably wound up in 1993. In the 1960's, when a lot of these blokes were in short pants, the RAAF was undergoing a huge expansion in both equipment and personnel. There were about 16,000 people in the RAAF in 1963 and this number rose to about 23,000 in 1969, an increase of 7,000 (nearly 45%) in only 6 years. The number of courses held at Wagga also rose from 58 in 1963 to 120 in 1965. All these additional people had to be recruited, housed, fed, clothed, trained and then posted to units – a big job.



Bob Menzies retired as Prime Minister in 1966. His Government had committed Australia to the war in Vietnam in 1962 and as a consequence, there was an obvious need to increase the ADF numbers in both personnel and equipment. Conscription into the Army began in 1964 and the RAAF were accepting new aircraft and needed the trained personnel to keep them flying. In 1962 the Iroquois began to arrive, in 1963, the RAAF accepted the first of its 116 Mirages, 18 Caribou aircraft were ordered in 1963 and started to arrive in 1964, 7 of which went straight to Vietnam. In 1964, 10 Orion aircraft were ordered to replace the old 11 Sqn Neppies, in 1966 12 C-130E's were delivered to 37 Sqn at Richmond to supplement the older C-130A's of 36 Sqn and in 1968, the first of 87 Macchis arrived. It was definitely catch up time and trained personnel were urgently needed to operate and maintain these extra assets.



The RAAF's apprenticeship scheme, and Forest Hill at Wagga, played a big part in all that. Without it, the expansion would not have happened as smoothly as it did. In 1960, Number 1 Recruit Training Unit was moved to Wagga and stayed there until 1964 when it was moved to Edinburgh because of the influx of trainees coming onto the Base. In 1966, there were 190 young blokes introduced to the RAAF's engineer Apprenticeship scheme. This made a total of 1,800 personnel training at the base, the majority being adult trainees – who were commonly called "Thicks" by the Appies who in turn were called "Brats" by the AT's....

The numbers on Base were so large that young blokes were forced to sleep in double bunks until new accommodation blocks could be built – but there were few complaints.

The following photos were taken at the reunion, but unfortunately, we don't have all the names, if you can help ID someone, please let us know so we can fill in the blanks.





Don't know, Don't know.





Don't know, Don't know, Don't know, Don't know, Don't know, Tom "Nails" Hobday, Don't know.



L-R: Nobby Hill, Don't know, Johnny Cecchin.



L-R: Kevin Kirk, Kevin "Custard Kerr, Keith Dinnerville



L-R: Trevor Mitchell, Mrs Mitchell, Don't know





L-R: Bob Bennett, Dick Tracy, Errol Fiske, Kevin "Custard" Kerr



L-R: Don't know, Mrs Ripper, Don Ripper



Darwin 2011.

In November last year, the US President, Barack Obama, made a whirlwind trip through Darwin where he visited the memorial for the [USS Peary](#), which was sunk in Darwin Harbour in 1942 during a Japanese air raid. He also met with some survivors of Japan's WWII attack on Darwin after which, he returned to the RAAF Base where he had a 'meet and greet' with both Australian and US servicemen and gave a short and well-received speech paying tribute to Australian diggers and reaffirming the value of the US/Australia Alliance.



Instrumental in the arrangements for the President's visit was Wng Cdr Gary Ilton who is the Deputy Commander of No 13 Squadron at Darwin. 13 Sqn is a bit like a Base Sqn of old.



Gary is continuing the Ilton tradition of serving with the RAAF, his father, Ted Ilton, retired from the RAAF back in 1976 with the rank of Wng Cdr. See [HERE](#).