

## Laverton today.

In March this year, while we were down in Melbourne for the [Avalon Air Show](#), we contacted Wing Commander Barbara Courtney who is the boss of RAAF Williams, two bases that many years ago we used to know as Point Cook and Laverton. In 1999, the two bases were renamed RAAF Williams, in honour of [Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams](#),



who many say was the 'father' of the RAAF. We asked if we could have a look over Laverton as we wished to take some photos for our magazine and she was only too happy to oblige. Many thanks to her for arranging it and also a big thank you to Flt Sgt Leigh Pridmore who is in charge of Security and Law Enforcement at Laverton and who put up with me asking silly questions and who patiently drove me all around the base to get these photos.



Laverton was the RAAF's third base, (Richmond was second) formed not long after Point Cook which was established in 1921. The increased rate of flying and the need for additional maintenance areas at Pt Cook necessitated its establishment and apart from flying units it was also the home of the Support and Training Command Headquarters, No 6 RAAF Hospital, as well as having many training and administrative functions.



Laverton's front gate, as it is today. Long gone is the old Meteor which used to sit, on guard, in the middle of the grassed round-about. The brick building, centre left in the pic, is one of the old WRAAF blocks. We don't know what they are used for today.

We got to Laverton about a month after a mini-tornado had gone through and caused an awful lot of damage. Many buildings were scarred, trees up-rooted or stripped, tiles were ripped off roofs, fences blown down but thankfully, no one was hurt. Unfortunately, because of the storm and the damage it caused, the old base looked a little worse for wear and there were a lot of places which were off limits because of safety precautions.

**Definitions** - meanings for the female and the male.

**COMMUNICATION** (ko-myoo-ni-kay-shon) n.

Female... The open sharing of thoughts and feelings with one's partner.

Male... Leaving a note before taking off on a fishing trip with the boys.

This is what it is like today, looking from the railway line, outside the entrance to the base, back towards Geelong Rd. Where once was vacant land, has grown into a small shopping centre. The road that leads down to Point Cook, which is reached by a major overpass, is now built up on both sides. Melbourne had moved west with a vengeance.



This is what Geelong Road, just outside the entrance to the base, used to be like in 1967.





The road below, inside the base, runs parallel with the railway line and goes from the front gate up past the old 1AD headquarters from where this photo was taken.

The damage caused to some of the trees by the storm can be clearly seen. Leigh Pridmore told us the “tornado” was very selective in its path, it smashed some areas and left others completely alone.



The old No 1 Aircraft Depot (1AD) headquarters building below. 1AD was operational at Laverton from 1926 until 1994 when all the Depots were wound up. The road above runs to the left of the HQ building and on to 1AD's hangers.



We asked John Butler and Frank Alley, both of whom used to work at Laverton, if they could remember which hanger used to be for what as our memory of those days has crashed.

Frank says “the 1AD hangars were behind the HQ building, near the Princes Highway. There was an old 11 Sqn Neptune parked outside that hangar”. (See Frank’s earlier story [HERE](#)) “The USAF U2’s used part of that hangar which was also used for static displays during air display weekends. The U2 pilot was checked over by a doctor in the 1AD hangar and then bussed to the tarmac outside the ARDU hangar where the aircraft was parked waiting, engine running. The guy who showed me all this was Major Pat O’Halloran who was one of the U2 pilots who flew over Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis in the early 60’s.”



The hangars above were the old ARDU hangars. ARDU was formed at Laverton, originally as No 1 Air Performance Unit, in 1943 and was responsible for carrying out flight trials on new aircraft as well as doing aircraft modifications.

During the War, flying trials included Spitfire, Beaufighter and Boomerang performance tests, as well as evaluations on various aircraft modifications including gun, radar and bombsight installations. In addition, the Unit carried out performance tests on captured Japanese 'Oscar' and 'Tony' fighters.

Following the War, the Unit was involved in tests on the CA-15 prototype, a Meteor Mk3, Lincoln bomber and De-Havilland Sea Hornet.

The unit was renamed Aircraft Research and Development Unit in 1947, with detachments operating in South Australia and New South Wales. By February 1977, it had relocated to Edinburgh, South Australia, from where it continues its vital role of testing and evaluating both aircraft and weaponry in the RAAF inventory.

ARDU has flown trials and development sorties on every aircraft in the ADF inventory, including F-111, Mirage, Macchi, Kiowa, Blackhawk and F/A-18.





The ever patient Leigh took us to the other end of the base and out onto what used to be the busy tarmac area to check out the hangars ‘up close and personal’. Click the pic to get a better look.

John Butler, who used to work at ARDU after finishing his Radtech conversion, says:-

The furthest hanger in the photo above was where, in 1966, we did our “metal bashing” course with ‘Squizzy Taylor’ at the helm (over the years, there must have been a million Squizzy Taylors in the RAAF). This was where, during our Mechs course, we built an aluminium chassis onto which, when we came back to do our Tech conversions, we soldered in radio bits and when it was all finished, the whole thing was able to receive 3UZ and other hot stations of the day. It was the home of the ARDU machinists, welders and metal bashers and, I think, they had a wood butchers section in there too. Many of the aircraft that we worked on had some wooden bits – like the Vampire two seater, which had the whole cabin assembly constructed of wood covered with fabric – very old school but light. One of the hangars was for the aircraft painters, I think.

ARDU took up about four of the hangars and I think that 21 Sqn had a hangar, but it was up the end closer to the camera then. ARDU had the luxury of putting all of the smaller aircraft (Sabres, Winjeels, Cessna 180s (Army), Vampires, etc) in the hangars. The Daks and Canberras lived outside except when we had to do major stuff and then we sometimes used the 1AD hangars (they were bigger), but they got filled up with “junk (like old English Electric Canberras, old bits of Lincolns, Daks etc, all of which would be priceless now.

I was engaged in the dismantling of one of the English Electric Canberras that was a prototype for our Aussie-made ones. It was given to the Lord Mayors’ Children’s camp at Portsea. We cut it into transportable bits. My job was to remove all of the radio gear (WHEW!), including the racks and antennas. The framies put it back together at Portsea. Very interesting.

It all seems like ancient history, now.



This grassed area is where the old wooden Airmans' Mess used to sit, just inside the front gate, to the left of the roadway. The wooden building at the rear is the old Cinema.

**THINGY (thing-ee) n.**

Female..... Any part under a car's hood.

Male..... The strap fastener on a woman's bra.



The New Airmans' Mess, over the road from where the old mess used to be – from memory, this was the site of the base service station.



The old ASCO canteen, now called the RAAF Williams Bistro???

We didn't get inside so we don't know how Bistroy it is, nor did we get through the double doors to the "Boozer" to see if that has changed over the years, one can only hope that it has.....

## COMMITMENT (ko-mit-ment) n.

Female..... A desire to get married and raise a family.

Male..... Trying not to hit on other women while out with this one.





The Airmans' "Blocks," over the road from the Bistro. Unfortunately, the blocks were all fenced off following the storm and we couldn't get inside to see if there were any changes since our last 'visit' – which was in 1967, though from the outside, they look a lot like they used to look.

We hope to be back in Melbourne for the next Avalon Air Show in 2013 – perhaps then.....



The old theatre, that is behind the 'long gone' Airmans' Mess and next to the old "WRAAFery", is included in the Wyndham Council's 1997 Volume of Heritage Places. It still operational and many people from around the area have formed a CLUB and enjoy movies in the building regularly. See [HERE](#).

Years ago, many a romantic evening was had in those walls.



## 6 RAAF Hospital.



6 RAAF Hospital, which started life in the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg, and which moved to Laverton, is now just called the “Health Centre Williams”.

Our recollection of the place was one of officialdom. We were relieved of our appendix here, early in 1967, when the hospital was in full swing and our memory of the nursing sisters, was one of officers first and carers of the sick and injured a distinct and far away second. We were definitely treated as an LAC first and as a patient second. Thank goodness the RAAF also had medical orderlies who were very caring and compassionate, though we can just imaging the conditions under which they had to work.



## Radschool.





Some years ago, the igloos and the little metal huts, that served as class rooms, were removed and the modern building above was built in which to carry on the business of turning raw young recruits into fixers of the RAAF's electronic bits.

Opened in 1974 and closed as Radschool in 1992, it is today used by Joint Logistics Command, which used to be called Support Command.

## **Appyland.**

All that remains of Appyland today are these two boarded up huts which sit behind the old Radschool building.



## **Officers Mess.**





### **“OC’s duck pond”.**

When we saw it in March, the OC’s duck pond was a mess of tangled trees and broken branches, left over from the storm that raged through in February.

Early in 1967, a friend of ours, no names no pack-drill, but his initials are John Butler, was returning to base after having spent an evening consuming copious quantities of one of CUB’s finest. Being caught unawares, he drove his red Datsun Bluebird SSS smack bang into the middle of the pond, which it seems is strategically placed to catch the unwary. Having a car placed amongst his precious ducks did not amuse the pond’s owner all that much but it was a source of massive amusement to those on 41 RTC.

We were told by Leigh Pridmore that although JB might have been the first to accomplish such a feat, he was by no means the last to do so. It seems JB set a trend which was to be copied by several others over the years.



### **REMOTE CONTROL (ri-moht kon-trohl) n.**

Female..... A device for changing from one TV channel to another.

Male..... A device for scanning through all 375 channels every 5 minutes.

## The North Gate.

This gate, which used to be a 'short cut' for the troops heading into the big smoke is no longer used. The 'cheap-fuel' tanker bloke used to park his vehicle at the end of the road, where it joined Geelong Rd and many a cash strapped trainee used the facility to keep their cars mobile.



This area, (below) just through the north gate, used to be a heavily wooded area and late in the evening, after sharing one or six social drinks in the Airman's Boozer, it was not unknown for RAAF blokes and blokettes to venture forth from the base, park amongst the foliage and discuss things of great importance.





## Aerial.

This aerial photo, one of Google Earth's, shows the location of the Base's facilities. The School of Languages has moved from down near the pier at Point Cook and is now housed in a new building opposite the base theatre.



## FLATULENCE (flach-u-lens) n.

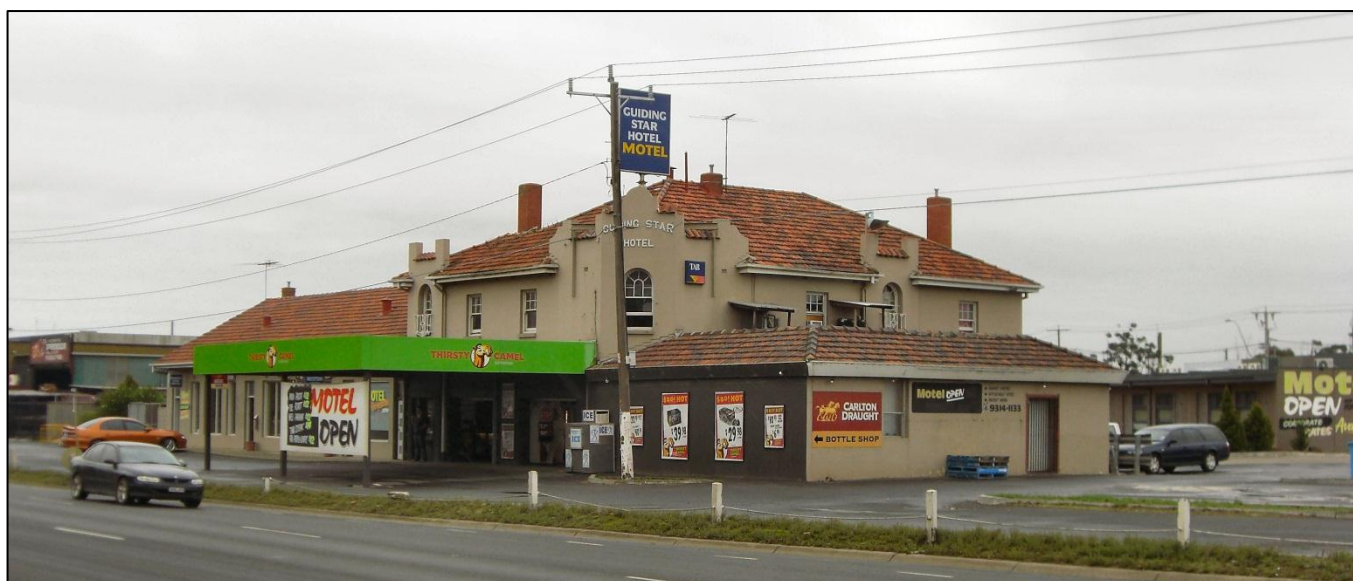
Female..... An embarrassing by product of indigestion.

Male..... A source of entertainment, self-expression, male bonding, a form of contest in which the perpetrator of the loudest and most pungent example is declared the winner.





This photo was taken many years ago.



Another place that hasn't changed a lot over the years, although, it isn't out in the middle of nowhere like it used to be is the Guiding Star Hotel – a 'stop over' on the way to town many years ago. These days the West Gate freeway by-passes it and you have to go looking for it.

## MAKING LOVE (may-king luv) n.

Female..... The greatest expression of intimacy a couple can achieve.

Male..... Call it whatever you want, just as long as you do it.