

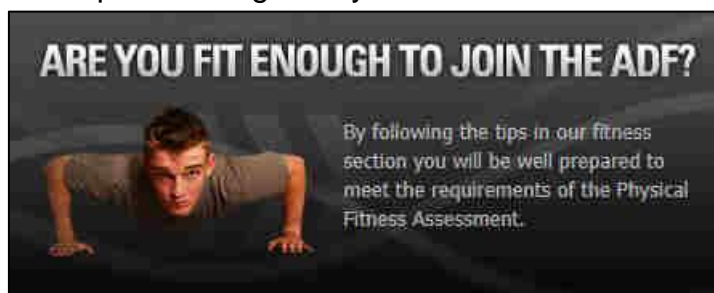
It's Elementary.

Anthony Element

I Wouldn't Have Missed It For The World.

Have you ever tried to explain to someone what it was really like in the RAAF, especially in those early days of your career? I had the experience recently. A nephew of mine, hoping to join up, wanted to know what to expect.

As an aside, how things have changed. Back in the day, you could get in as long as you had only one head and you weren't a serial killer. At least, not a convicted one. Nowadays, you have to have an IQ higher than the peak on the cap of that legendary DI who used to take his specially made bed on postings; and whose name I can't remember – yet another worrying sign of early senility. Actually, not so early now I think about it. And you have to be fit to be accepted. Who saw that coming?



Anyhow, back to explaining the RAAF.

"First," I said, "you have to do an aptitude test."

"What's that?"

"Well, they ask you a bunch of questions and from that they figure out what you're good at."

"I already know what I'm good at."

"Yes, but the military doesn't need....." He cut in abruptly. "Okay, so what sort of questions?"

"Well, I still remember the first one in my test. It said, 'You're walking along the road and you see a house on fire. What do you do:'

- A. Watch, while keeping a safe distance;
- B. Call the Fire Brigade;
- C. Call the police;
- D. Call your father."

The nephew looked at me with a weird expression. "So what's the answer?"

"Wow, you're going to be great," I told him. "Once you get accepted, you go to Rookies."

“What’s that?”

“It’s where you learn how to be an airman. People yell at you, you march up and down and then more people yell at you. You get to polish lots of stuff, and when you’re finished doing that, the same people yell at you some more.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, they just do. But you get to carry a rifle.”

“Why?”

“Well that’s a bit hard to explain. It’s hardly ever loaded so it’s more or less useless most of the time. But back in my day, it was handy to fix your bayonet to.”

“What’s a bayonet?”

“It’s a... it’s a knifey thingy you stick on the end of your rifle.”

“But why would I have to know that kind of stuff? I want to be a technician.”

“Look,” I told him, “You can either become an airman or you can be logical. But you can’t do both.”

I got this strange sense that his enthusiasm wasn’t, well, as fired up as I’d expected, but I ploughed on, determined that he be fully informed.

“Once you finish being a Rookie, you have a graduation parade.”

“To celebrate?”

“Sort of.”

“So what happens?”

“You march for a bit. Then you stand really, really still for a long time. An officer makes a speech, which you can’t hear because they always put RAAF bases in windy spots and anyway he’s standing on a box too far away to be heard. And then, when his lips stop moving, somebody yells at you and you march some more.”

By this time, the nephew was looking pensive.

After graduation, you go to wherever your training course is held and then...”



“Yeah?”

“And then, you become a Poolie.”

“Well,” said the nephew. “That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“Don’t get ahead of the story, son. It’s not what you think and it’s definitely not like it sounds. It’s where you turn up for work each morning and someone draws straws to see who spends the day doing which crappy job somewhere on the base.”

“Like what?”

“You might scrub pots and pans, or wash floors.” I momentarily went all misty eyed as a memory came back. “Or you might get lucky like I did a couple of times and be the runner for the typing pool. There was this brunette...” I gave myself a good shake. “Anyway, I don’t think they have typing pools anymore. They suffered the same fate as bayonets.”

For some reason, the nephew was clearly beginning to have a few doubts. “Sounds like crap to me,” he said.

“Oh no, it gets better. Once you’ve done your trade training, you get sent to a unit. And then you do really fun stuff.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yeah. In my case, refuelling aircraft.”

“What’s that like?”

“Ever refuelled a car?”

“Yeah,” he replied, a bit cautiously I thought.

“Well,” I said. “There you go.”

“And how much training did you have by that time?”

I added it up. “About two and a half years.”

“To refuel aircraft?”

I was a bit taken aback. “Well, not only. You do other stuff. My favourite job was towing aircraft and reversing them into the hangar.”



He didn't look impressed.

"It was fun," I said, trying to sound convincing. "Imagine backing a trailer into a parking space, only the trailer's got another trailer hanging on the back of it."

The nephew's eyes widened "That's impossible."

"Yeah, well, I didn't say it was easy." "And," I continued, "Once the aircraft are off on a mission, you get to sit in the hut and play Hunt The ... Oh, never mind."

"Hunt the what?" he asked. Clearly this had caught his interest.

"It's a card game. And I forget how you play it." I mumbled. Which is surprising, now I think about it, because out of twenty years in the service, I reckon I spent about a year of it altogether, playing... Hunt The... well, you all know what I'm talking about.

"But you do get to wear your uniform into town to score with the babes," he said. His voice was beginning to waver.

"God," I said, "you never wear your uniform into town."

"Why not?"

"Well, you don't want to look like a complete idiot, do you? And, anyway, all that would happen is someone would ask you what time the next train to Brighton leaves."

There was an uncomfortable silence for a while.

"So," I said, "When are you putting your app in?"

He looked down, and kicked at a loose nail in floor. "I dunno. I'm ah... I'm just thinking about it."

I can't understand why he wasn't excited. I had a great time.

Afterwards, the conversation got me thinking. I could be good at this. I wonder if the RAAF have got a vacancy for a soon to be geriatric recruiter.



"What I need is an exact list of specific unknown problems we might encounter."

Rod Faux.

Rod Faux, who was recently on a holiday through Cambodia, says it took him a while but he finally worked out how to use his phone to check his emails, about par for a well-trained Radtech!! He also learned to stay on the marked path. The sign was 2 feet from the path!!! Not much margin for error!

Click the pic to read the sign.



Froggers Reunion.



These blokes, who all went through the Academy at Froggnall back in the 1960's, along with their lovely partners, meet every 5 years or so at various locations to catch up, swap yarns, compare how old the other bloke has got and generally have a good time. This year 124 of them went to Wagga and met at the Astor Inn on the 18th May, 2012, for a meet and greet, a few drinkies and, unlike the old days, most of them were still standing at lights out.

Laurie Lindsay, or L² to those who don't know him, says this is a sad reflection on the aging process, he reckons not so long ago at least half of them would have been comatose by the end of day and whereas a glass or red used to last no longer than 10 seconds, these days it tends to last half the night.

Sad really!!

Wally Nelowkin took most of these pics which are of the Friday night M&G, the walk in the Botanical Gardens, sips at the Wagga Winery, Wagga Gallery (what were we doing there??) and breakfasts at the Motel, all of which were nicked and sent to us by L² and just in case you don't understand RAAF abbreviations, L² has also sent us an explanation.

ENGAERO – aeronautical
ENGRAD - radio
ENGINST - instruments

ENGELEC - electrical
ENGARM – armament
ENGMECH –transport (mechanical)



L-R: Dave Edwards (EQUIPO), Chris Neil (AERO), Dick Jacobson (RADO), “Flash” Henry (ELECO)



L-R: Barry Knight (ELECO), Brontus Dudek (AERO), Frank Grimshaw (INSTO), Laurie Lindsay (RADO), Maureen Kerr, Carol Jewell, Carole Traise, Elva Edwards.



L-R: Carol Jewell, Carole Traise, Anita Giles



'E-mail is not to be used to pass on information or data. It should be used only for company business.



L-R: Helen Bukmanis, Carole Traise



L-R: Bill Mayne (GUNNY), Barney Knight (INSTO), Dick Jacobson (RADO)



L-R: Chris Neil (AERO), Col Giles (AERO), Dave Edwards (EQUIPO)



L-R:.. Evelyn Bennett, Bob Bennett (INSTO), Sue White, Barry White (AERO), Col Giles (AERO), Anita Giles.



L-R: Val Bukmanis (AERO), Bob Bennett (INSTO), Brontus Dudek (AERO), Barry White (AERO)



And just so there is no question as to who is the boss here,

You can see a lot more photos of the weekend [HERE](#).



'This project is so important we can't let things that are more important interfere with it



This (Serving) Life.

This article by Ted Strugnell was first published in
"The Weekend Australian - Review Magazine"
in the "This Life" series.

IT all began for us in Charleville in the early 60s, three brothers growing up in a typical south-west Queensland country town with me living next door. In those days, many young men - to seek employment or just to get out of the place - joined the armed services. I joined the air force, the oldest brother next door enlisted in the army shortly after and the other two brothers followed me into the RAAF.



Fast forward to Darwin. After more than 120 years of service between us including three tours of Vietnam, four of Malaysia, one of the Middle East, one of East Timor, and one of PNG, the youngest brother, the last to leave, is discharging from the RAAF. The elder brother, another ex-service mate and I have flown to Darwin to accompany him on this last sentimental journey from Darwin to Brisbane and out of the air force.

We drive by day and by night solve the problems of the world over a carton of beer. We sleep under the stars; travel through the lands of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson and legendary outback towns such as Daly Waters, Camooweal, Longreach and Winton.

As we drive through the heartland of the continent we'd served so long, we talk of airfields and steaming jungles, people we knew, a few no longer with us and others on pensions for life. As always a price was paid and many never grew this old to reminisce like this. We speak of the euphoria and the desperation; the good times getting better with each bar room retelling, never quite telling the whole truth about the bad.

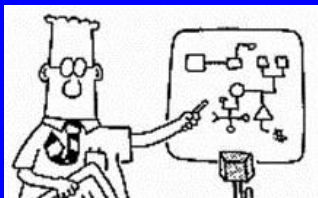
On the sixth day out, as we approach Charleville, we are all suddenly quiet, thinking of our own histories in the town. We think of first loves, good days at school, bad days at school, football games won and lost, fights we had and got out of and parents and siblings long passed away. In three days there by day we visit old neighbours and parents of long-left school friends, and we visit the cemetery. Even at that tender age we had left a few behind.



By night we hit the three remaining pubs to see if there is anybody else we know still alive.

Day eight out of Darwin and at 2359 hours - just before midnight - youngest brother is officially discharged from the RAAF. It is no coincidence we chose to be in Charleville on this day, back where it all began. The next morning we awaken, hung over, with the usual hackneyed jokes: "You've finally reached the highest rank in the air force. It's Mister." Now it's only a short 800km leg home to families and it's finally over, or is it?

As we drive I think of those who have gone before us and my daughter, who served a tour in East Timor, a nephew who served in Afghanistan and is still in the army, and another nephew who is thinking of joining the RAAF and I realise: it will never be over.



Doing it right is no excuse for not meeting the schedule.'