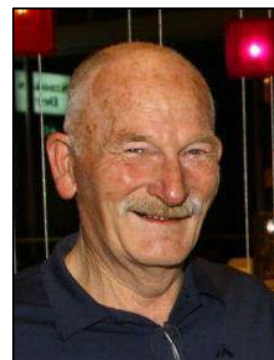




My Story.

John Seward

John was born in Featherston in the North Island of New Zealand and in 1960 joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) as an apprentice armourer. Back then the RNZAF didn't have their own appy training facilities and prior to John joining, NZ appies did their training in the UK at RAF Halton which is one of the RAF's largest bases. Unfortunately for John, the Kiwi Gov't decided to switch their appy training from the UK to Australia, so John missed out on a 3 year holiday in the UK and instead "enjoyed" a 3 year stint in the middle of NSW at Wagga with the dust and flies in summer and frost and fogs in winter.



14 Appy Armourers.



Back row (L-R): Greg Morrison; John Wattus; John Clarkson; Bob Hogg; Pat Godman; Brian Dettman; John Curtis.

Front row (L-R): Larry Hayne; Jeff Hatswell; Bill Chitty; Graeme Monkhouse; John Seward; Bob Wilson; Barry Scott; Dennis Evans.

Apart from being selected as the NSW Apprentice of the Year in 1962, he completed his training in August 1963 as Dux of the combined 14Appy intake. His other interests, while at Wagga, included:

- football, he was Captain of the First XI RAAF Training Establishment Rugby Team and:
- small and large bore shooting, he was a Champion-Shot Marksman while at Wagga and later on his return to NZ.

After Wagga he was posted to 2 Sqn at Amberley for 6 months follow-on training before being repatriated back to NZ to Armament Section at the RNZAF's Base at Ohakea. Back in NZ he became involved in sport parachuting and was elected the president of the NZ Federation of parachute clubs, a position he held from 1966 to 1976 where he was responsible to the NZ Civil Aviation Authority for overall administration, training and accident investigations. He also planned and managed the first international 10 man Star Meet at Masterton in 1971.



In 1964, shortly after returning to NZ, he applied for and was successful in transferring to Aircrew and in 1966, at RNZAF Base Wigram, he graduated as a navigator with a Distinguished Pass. In 1967 he was posted to Ohakea for conversion training onto Canberras with 14 (Bomber) Squadron then from 1968 to 1969 he operated with the Fiji, Australia and other South East Asian Air Forces as well as deployments to RAF Base Tengah in Singapore.

Apart from operational navigation duties with five NZ squadrons, he was involved in the training and setting of standards for navigators and pilots on four of the squadrons, being the Navigation Leader on three of them, Flight Commander on two and Deputy Squadron Commander on one.

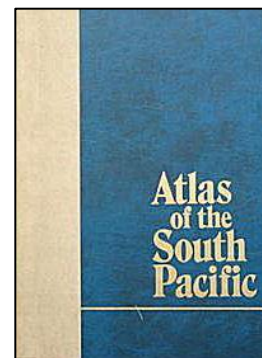
In 1970, until 1972, as well as continuing to fly periodically with 14 Squadron, he served as the Joint Services Public Relations Officer in Auckland. He lived with the Navy, worked from Army HQ in Auckland city and looked after a region comprising most of the North Island where he was responsible for joint Service media liaison and publicity requirements, including at times, the NZ Police. In 1972 he was deployed to Bangladesh to report on RNZAF contribution in international humanitarian aid mission under auspices of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In 1972 he was posted to 1 Sqn which operated 6 “slow and uncomfortable” Bristol Freighters then after converting on this aircraft he had 12 months flying through NZ, Australia and the South Pacific and in Jan 1973 it was off to the NZ Junior Staff College for a course then back to 1 Sqn as the Sqn’s operational Navigator. In July 1974 he completed an Advanced Navigation Course from which he qualified as a Nav Instructor then it was back to 1 Sqn as the Sqn’s Navigation leader, responsible for line training and setting standards for Sqn navigators.



In 1976 he was off to 41 Squadron, which had been at the RSAF’s Tengah Base in Singapore since 1962 and which also operated the Bristol Freighter (4 of) as well as 4 UH1 Iroquois then in 1977, the RNZAF finally realised the old Bristol had had its day and pulled the Sqn back to NZ and replaced the Bristols with C-130’s.

Back in NZ he was attached to the NZ External Intelligence Bureau which was part of the Prime Minister’s Department and which had the task of collecting, collating and analysing information on Pacific Nations. This involved liaising with Government and Civil Aviation authorities with regard to NZ’s civil aviation international operations. He also contributed to the production of the “Atlas of the South Pacific”, an oversize hard-cover book which provides a great overview of all the islands in the South Pacific and which is an official atlas provided by the New Zealand government. It is full of maps of each country and the major islands within various countries and provides basic information about each country which can be supplemented with cruising guides.



From 1979 to 1982 he was posted to 42 (VIP) Air Transport Squadron which operated 4 four Andover twin-engine transports out of Ohakea RNZAF Base and while there he was promoted from Navigation Leader to Flight Commander and eventually deputy Squadron Commander. He was also elected President of the Officers’ Mess Committee. Today, 42 Sqn operates Beechcraft B200 Super King Airs.



In 1982, until 1987, he was promoted and posted once again, this time as Base Commander of RNZAF Base Shelly Bay which was situated in Wellington. Shelly Bay was home to Army, Navy, Air Force and civilian people and John’s responsibilities included their training,

advancement, health, welfare, morale, accommodation and catering. He had also to provide administrative support for over 500 RNZAF personnel serving either in Wellington or overseas and providing catering and reception facilities for senior Government and Defence officials and visiting overseas VIP's. In his spare time he joined the "Friends of the RNZAF Museum" committee which was busy raising funds for the establishment of the Museum at RNZAF Base Wigram.

Shelly Bay, which had been in Defence Force hands from 1885, was closed in 1995 and in 2009 was handed over to the local Wellington People.

In 1985 he was on the move again, this time to RNZAF headquarters in Wellington as the Air Transport Staff Officer where he represented the RNZAF at Skytanker 85 meet at RAF Fairford in the UK, and at Air Standardisation Coordination Committee (ASCC) meeting 44 (Air Transport operations) in Canada in 1986.

His next move was to the Commandant of the NZ Cadet Forces' desk, a position he held for 3 years. During his stewardship, the organisation, which comprised 5000 cadets and 420 volunteers, grew from 87 to 104 cadet units.

His last eleven years of service were as the spokesperson and Public Affairs Officer for the Chief of Defence Force, a position he thoroughly enjoyed and which included operational service in East Timor alongside the ADF contingent. He was contracted to the Civil Aviation Authority during the last four years as a Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator, providing that service on a roster that covered out-of- normal working hours, weekends and public holidays.



He left the RNZAF in May 2004 to join New Zealand's Maritime Safety Authority and became the Operations Manager of Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand, which had responsibility for sea, air and land search and rescue activities over an area of 30 million square kilometres of the earth's surface – the third largest SAR region in the world. He qualified as a commercial pilot and was, for twelve years, the President and Chief Instructor for the New Zealand Federation of Sport Parachute Clubs, with the added responsibility of investigating and reporting on sport parachuting accidents on behalf of the Civil Aviation Department.

He finally retired from his search and rescue role on the 24th September 2014 and just to give himself "something to do" he has strapped on the tool bag and joined a mainline steam railway preservation and operating trust.

The RNZAF's permanent facilities are now structured around only three Air Force bases, two in the North Island - Auckland, Ohakea, and Woodbourne at the top of the South Island with the Air Staff in Wellington. Each base is home for units unique to that base and can host other units moving to that location on a temporary basis for exercises or operations.



Arthur “Gus” Comer.

The story of Arthur (Gus) Comer, famous as a the ‘Bible-bashing’ airman.

On the 27th October, 1947, Gus enlisted at Laverton, the beginning of a 22 year career that saw him rise through the ranks at an astonishing rate, to become a Warrant Officer Radio Technician (Air) in December 1960, finally being discharged in September 1969 – a long time ago.



How did this shy, adolescent youth get enough courage to take such a dramatic step? The answer lies with the young lady pictured above, his wife Margaret, who he married at Penrith (where she had lived all her life), in March 1956 and who is still with him sixty years later. In her early teens someone told her she should pray and ask God to bring her the right husband. This Christian young woman, part of a Methodist family (her mother the church organist), dutifully did so. Then, she waited. And waited, and waited.

Early in life Gus had become an atheist, believing Christianity was just a prop for weak people to lean on. But he believes God chose him as the answer to Margaret's prayer and so organised his life in order to answer that prayer. He had been born and raised in Victoria, a long way from Penrith.

Quite a remarkable event led him into RAAF service. He and a friend, Les (Marconi) Jenkins had been working in radio in civvy street when Les saw a recruiting ad in the paper looking for men to join the RAAF to become Radio Technicians and the pay rate quoted for RAAF service seemed very attractive. So they applied. Following Recruit Training at Laverton (No 7 PAF) it was off to Ballarat for No 36 Radio Serviceman course (Ground), then off to Williamtown for a few months, then a stint at No 1TS Point Cook, then back to Ballarat for No 99 Wireless Maintenance Mechanics course, (roughly Nov 49-Jan 51), followed by a posting to 1 AD Radio Section. (he ended up an airy). At that time Church Parade was compulsory for all who had entered a religion on their enlistment form and Gus had put Methodist, the nominal religion of his parents. It was during those regular church parades his atheism was first challenged by those science films made by the Moody Science Institute in the US which showed some of the marvels of the natural world. He still wasn't convinced, but it had opened the door slightly.



He got his LAC props about ten weeks after getting to Laverton and his Corporal's 23 months later. From October 51 to Jan 53 he was in Japan, running the Base Squadron Radio Section. In June 1953 he was posted to 2SD, detachment D, at Dubbo where he got his third stripe and together with LAC Bob Kemp, he had to assess many thousands of radio and radar relics left over from WWII, all of which were stored in a gigantic hangar. All that gear ended up at Board of Survey.



Having being brought up in a Methodist household, he had not been introduced to alcohol and when he received his third stripe and on being introduced to the Sergeant's Mess, he was forced to down his first pint of beer. After that, not being too keen on the drink, and not wanting to spend his evenings at the bar, he started analysing and editing the antiquated 'Y' Group stores (see [HERE](#) for the RAAF's full equipment grouping) vocabs they had to use to try and identify equipment. He found they had stacks of errors in them, items often given two different numbers, or two or more different items given the same number. He filled several exercise books with suggested corrections, which were forwarded to Suppcom HQ in Melbourne. The job at Dubbo finished after about six months, but because of his extra-curricular efforts, the CO recommended him for 'Accelerated promotion', which explains how he came to be promoted to F/Sgt less than 24 months later, not long after arriving in Penrith, in April 55.



He was still not a Christian, but God had entered his life in a quite remarkable way two years earlier. He was walking through a forest in Boronia, close to his parent's home, quite alone, nobody around for hundreds of metres, when he says he suddenly had the overpowering sense of another presence, he immediately felt God was there. He said "I fell to my knees, wrote on the ground 'Nearer my God to thee'. I didn't become a Christian then, but I never again questioned God's existence".

How did he get to Penrith with the RAAF? There was no Airborne Radio or Radar there but a Remote Receiving Station was being constructed at Marsden Park, a few km north from Penrith, to provide communications for eastern Area HQ at Lapstone. He thought it was a job for a Ground Technician, surely? and there were two Ground SNCOs at Laverton who would normally go on such a mission, but both were unavailable at that precise moment, 'Shorty' McDonald was ill and Gabby Hayes had a drink problem. So an Air Tech was sent. Gus!

The Marsden Park project got nowhere, the underground bunker filled with water, which refused to go away. But God had a purpose in all this. On the sixth Sunday after his arrival (8th May, 55), he went to the evening service at the local Methodist church, and there met Margaret. Had he gone in any previous week, it wouldn't have happened. God's perfect timing again?? He visited her home after the service, met her family, returned to the barracks, rose early next morning, wrote a letter to his family down in Melbourne saying: 'I have found THE girl'. I had never even had a girlfriend prior to this!

He spent a week there, went to a movie on Friday night with Margaret and family, had another experience of God's presence in early hours of the Saturday morning, and there committed his life to him. On the Monday morning he was whisked off to Rathmines for a 14 day stint for an Officer's Pre-selection Course. He didn't get a commission, then, or when he applied again in 59. After Rathmines it was back to Ballarat for a six-month stay on No 3 Rad Tech Air conversion course, Radar stuff which he found very interesting.



During that course he made several high-speed dashes to Penrith, leaving Ballarat around 1630 Friday, driving through the night to Penrith, getting there around 0700 more dead than alive, then leaving around 1400 Sunday to dash back to Ballarat.

After his marriage in March 56, it was back to 1AD, renting a place in Newport until being granted a Married Quarter in Nov 58. Their elder daughter was born in May 57, (9lb 11oz), causing vast damage. He was in the Radio section and was one of a group of SNCOs sent to GAF, Fisherman's Bend for training on the new Sabre jets being made there, then it was back to 1 AD to pass on the knowledge. He moved from Radio to Radar section around mid '59, (he thinks).

He was promoted to Warrant Officer on the 1st December 1960 and was posted to Radschool at Ballarat which was preparing to move to Laverton, so he didn't have to vacate their house at Laverton. He reported to Ballarat then was sent straight back to Laverton as part of the advance party, with Sqn Ldr Stuart Jenkins, to oversee fitting out of new buildings. In February he was sent to Point Cook for a Warrant Officers and SNCOs Admin course, which he topped, mainly because his English was better than that of the others on the course. Then it back to Laverton to teach, until April 65.

April 65 saw a move to Williamstown, Mirage Radio Section, then Radar Section. Their second daughter Anne had been born at Laverton in June 60, and they had adopted a part-aboriginal boy, David, in early 64. April 67 saw a final posting, to SUPPCOM HQ in Melbourne, before finally to Laverton for discharge.

He and Margaret are now in a Retirement Village at Sebastopol, next move to the crematorium when the time comes. They spend a lot of time informing people of the threat Islam poses to the future wellbeing of Australia, which he sees as sleep-walking to its own destruction. He commends to anyone interested in understanding Islam, Mark Durie's excellent book, *The Third Choice* (Deror Press).

As to the 'Bible-bashing', he refutes that term. He says "I never hesitated to tell people where I stood, but left it at that. I believe I was denied a commission in 1960, because of my faith."



Margaret and Gus at Frankston in 07, just before their move to Sebastopol.