

Wing Commander Stanley John Wilson 1932 - 2019



W G C D R
John Wilson
passed away
peacefully on
13 January
2019 in
Canberra with
his family by
his side. He
was interred

with his wife of many years, Sue, in the Woden Cemetery, Canberra on 21 January 2019.

Stanley John Wilson was born in Ware, Hertfordshire in England on the 7th March, 1932. Always known as John, the eldest of 4 children, of Stanley Joseph and Ellen Winifred. His father had served in the British Army in World War 1, and thought there was more to life than the farm work - the family then decided to move to Australia. At the age of six, John and his family embarked on the "Strath-allan", a magnificent P&O liner of 23,722 tons, on its maiden voyage to Australia, arriving in Fremantle on the 19 April 1938.

John's dream was to be a pilot in the Air Force. However, after he was diagnosed as colour deficient, his dream was not achievable & although most disappointed, he was still keen on the Air Force. He joined the RAAF on 1 September 1953 at 21 years of age, initially as an Equipment Assistant, before being commissioned as a Junior Intelligence Officer on communication duties, specialising as a photo interpreter. This was the beginning of a long career in the defence force.

An Air Force career option at the time was to be a linguist - a choice of Russian, Mandarin or Indonesian. John chose Mandarin, a language that has over 50,000 Chinese characters and five tonal ranges - this language became a lifelong love and learning experience. John went to the RAAF School of Languages at Point Cook from 1954-55 to learn Chinese and after some further study was posted to Hong Kong in early 1956.

During his time in Hong Kong he lived with two Chinese families, as was sometimes the practice with Air Force students. After an 18-month tour, John was posted back to Point Cook for two years as an instructor. He then returned to Hong Kong for a full time, two-year diploma course at Hong Kong University

followed by six months work as a linguist and other associated intelligence duties at the RAF Unit Hong Kong called Little Sai Wan - officially known as RAAF Butterworth Det A.

Duties also involved operating from another RAF Unit at Batty's Belvedere, located at The Peak - which developed into a fully integrated operational and residential site. Unit personnel also worked in a mountain top station at Tai Mo San in the New Territories and lived at RAF Sek Kong with British Army/Gurkha units.

John was posted in 1968 to Colorado, USA for four months, to undergo training as a Photographic Interpreter (PI). On the way, he detoured to Bundaberg to see his future wife, Sue. After his training in USA John was posted to Canberra and after only six months of marriage, to Vietnam in February 1969. He spent six months in Saigon as a PI with the 16th Tactical Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron, based at the Tan Son Nhut air base. He was a supervisor of the photo intelligence unit from February to August 1969.

In 1970 John was posted to RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland where he & Sue bought their first home in Ipswich - a classic Queenslander. He was the Intelligence Officer at No 82 Wing, where the author first met him when a navigator with No 6 Squadron. He was posted again in October 1972 to Laverton, Victoria. In 1974 he was posted back to Canberra, before promotion to Squadron Leader and a posting to RAAF London in February 1976, - back to his homeland - to work in joint intelligence at the Ministry of Defence.

Back in Australia in February 1979, resuming life back in Canberra. But in less than a year John was unexpectedly posted to RAAF Base Pearce, in Western Australia, back to his 'home state'. After 18 months, he was back in Canberra, to work at RAAF Fairbairn in the 'Barn'.

After 29 years in the Air Force and reaching the rank of Wing Commander, John decided it was time to leave. In his resignation application, he said, "I've had a long and satisfying career in the service and with less than five years remaining before reaching retiring age, I wish to return to civilian life".

After retiring from the Air Force in 1982, he took nine months off before



returning to work in Russell offices, Department of Defence, as a civilian in the intelligence section. John joined the RAAF Association (ACT Division) in 1996 and he and Sue did a lot of work to help with fundraising and organising events, especially during his time as Vice President from 2003 to 2007. They were stalwarts of the Association, had so much energy, and loved doing things together. When Editor, John assisted me with editing the Newsletter and earlier issues of Wings. He was meticulous in this task and would edit every character, punctuation and paragraph format. The final copy was always just right.

John was a gentleman and well known to his ex RAAF friends for his warm smile, deep thinking, intelligence, courtesy, friendliness and his Mandarin language skills. He was a frequent visitor to Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra for his weekly Mandarin 'discussion group' with his tutor, Lucy Liu and other linguists; an activity he kept up for 20 years. When I was an active member of the Canberra Yacht Club, I saw John regularly in his trailer-sailer, mostly solo, sailing on Lake Burley Griffin. He would ride his motor cycle all over; to Association meetings, Mandarin language meetings and even to Broulee on the south coast of NSW, until he stopped riding at age 86.

Farewell to John on his last flight; he will be remembered by his family and his RAAF friends for a life well lived, full of adventure, love and humility. He was a gentleman.

Lance Halvorson