



## My Story

### Llew Robb

Some years ago, before Llew became competent on the computer, he punched out on his trusty typewriter the following story of his life and he jokingly said that I could use it in the Beavers book if it was ever published, or failing that I could use it as an epitaph at his funeral. Therefore, I feel he would approve of my printing this here for all of you to read.

Llew passed away on the 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

Warren Dickson

### My Brief Life Story?

I was born and raised in the thriving country town of Griffith in central NSW by wonderful Christian parents. I'll admit that I was a cheeky brat at times to both parents and teachers as Dad had to take "the belt" to me on occasion and I lost count of the times my palms received the cane at school.

I'm sure there was a sigh of relief from them when I was accepted into my RAAF apprenticeship on my 16th birthday in Jan '61. I know that our time at RST has been well covered by others, especially the most interesting 50 years on, Wombat journal, but a couple of my own continuing shenanigans will surely bring a smile and an understanding nod of the head to many a fellow Beaver.



At the end of first year I purchased a 1938 Plymouth sedan, with rego, from a graduating Oyster. Still too young to obtain a licence so the Oysters borrowed the car back a week later to tow a Vampire over the railway line in the night to dismantle the tail booms and reassemble them around the flagpole prior to their graduation parade the next day. So, if the Service Police are still



looking for the culprits— I know nothing! Dexter Dutton was very unimpressed by the ingenuity of the Oyster framies. Our youngest Beaver, Ray Ashton, who also hailed from Griffith, and myself convinced Nicky Winter (CO of RSTT) and the orderly room leave clerks that we did not require any travel warrants that holiday period as our parents were picking us up. I conned a Tulip to drive the Plymouth off base to the shop car park adjacent to the main entry.

With signed leave passes in hand we simply walked out and jumped in the car for our 4 week Christmas leave. Drove into Wagga, walked around the corner to motor registry and I got my basic L plate drivers' licence. Back into the car and off to Griffith. Somewhere between Collingullie and Narrandera the good Lord above tried to cool my silly acts by dumping 40 million gallons of water on us and I couldn't find the bleedin' wiper switch— but we got home OK.

The starter motor failed a few days later but the crank handle kept me mobile for a week or two. It cost me a week of appy wages to have it rebuilt. Five quid. (10 dollars) Almost lost my virginity in that car (and later Russ Cross's mark one Zephyr and Karl Loibl's FX Holden) but being a good Christian boy, it did not happen. Further details are not available to anyone! I sold the car to Niel Morton soon after and I believe it ended up in the 'Bidjee some months later.

During first year I was fortunate enough to bunk down in hut 301 with five "fush and chup" eaters from across the Tasman sea who were amazed that I could hitchhike home and back before bed checks in one day. (400 km return) Dave Comber was one who gladly took that risk, as 400 km in NZ was a weekend journey. I do wonder if Dave remembers a short sojourn in the at Yanco on a hot summer day which involved a-middy of beer and a middy of sherry. The inexperience of teenagers and a smiling publican!! No fond memories there of course.



I was crook— really crook for hours thereafter and if Mum and Dad suspected anything, they said nothing but I suspect they smiled at each other at some point and said words along the lines of "he still wants to learn the hard way" I have never since ordered a middy of sherry by the way.

Not too proud of my 54 days confined to barracks (CB) and only beaten by Peter Burman with 57 but he was discharged before his 3 years so I probably hold an unofficial record of being a pain in the bum to our wonderful superiors.

Example: Second year trade training! driving instruction! smoko break. "Test driving" a Dodge panel van to see if it had similar torque to a side valve ford V8 by applying the foot brake gently and smokin' up the rear wheels for about 5 seconds on smooth concrete and increasing brake pressure to a stall situation. 7 days CB! No defence other than motor magazine journos did that every week. Sad to say that the young hoons nowadays create far more damage and heartache.



During class trade lectures one day, I was asked a question by F/SGT Reg Brown and gave my answer, obviously too quietly as the other instructor, one youngish John Swannel snapped at me "I didn't hear your answer apprentice Robb" I then snapped back "well clean your bloody ears out" — 3 days CB. I was a bit slow in learning the military meaning of insubordination, but graduated nonetheless. Fellow Beaver Cavan Greaves and I were posted to Fairbairn in Canberra so I lashed out and bought a brand-new Morris 850 mini because I could not afford my first choice, that being an upmarket semi luxury Nissan Cedric.



Fate may have intervened here as the mini was the beginning point of my motorsport hobby. The Cedric may have led to a future in banking, stock brokering or airline pilot or similar with respect to those that chose those careers in later life, I was happy to be a spanner jerker/grease monkey/trucky to this date still.

Space does not permit my involvement in all motorsport activities since 1964, sufficient to say I'm still involved and get to drive some great cars on the track occasionally. I never did play golf, sail a boat, learn to fly, collect butterflies; or go to the ballet or operas. Time is too short to try everything.

The RAAF Butterworth Motor Club was a real buzz as many would know during the late 60's, early 70's but being the somewhat hyperactive young man still, I got involved also with RRB. (Radio RAAF Butterworth). So picture this:

(Xylophone gongs,bing bong bung bingy 'This is radio RAAF Butterworth— the voice of the Royal Australian Air Force in Malaysia and the time now is 4 pm and that is time for Llew Robb's Country And Western Roundup." I still have heaps of reel to reel tapes, some of which contain my Aussie artist shows and featuring the top singers at the time. Radio Australia got a copy of Johnny Cash's top 10 hit "A boy named Sue" weeks before it was released in Oz, (but we suspect it was sourced from the Yanks in Vietnam). The Yank troops on R&R loved RRB, our volleyball comps. (I was second grade team rep.) tennis and mud crab feasts at the RAAF club on Penang.





Good times.

At some time mid 1970 John Rouse and myself were employed on the maintenance of specialist vehicles and the boffins somehow decided that a promotion to corporal was now OK. Truckies always waited and waited for an upwards movement. Although a bit of an embarrassment, I must share this incident with all soon after.

On Monday mornings, the fire crews would do their usual full-on test run of their vehicles and equipment, then make foam/water etc. after a max speed run down the airstrip. One of those big red Rolls Royce powered mongrels was seriously lacking power. Fuel starvation suspected so my F/SGT (name forgotten) asked me to check it out ASAP and get it back to the flight line. No sweat. Got Rousey to take the carby off for a checkover while I looked at the dual fuel pumps, filters and supply lines etc. My logic was to turn on the ignition and check that the electric fuel pump was working as normal and to catch the fuel in a hand held container. No probs there. The next step would be to check out the secondary mechanical pump for an increase in flow volume. Still logical.



However, in 1970 we did not fit the newish electronic ignition systems as the ultra-reliable copper cored high tension leads and regular maintenance to the dizzy breaker points and spark plugs ensured that reliable performance, but that system did create some UHF radio interference so all leads were externally shrouded and earth separately to avoid radio probs. with aircraft and control tower operations. They were also a time consuming pain in the wrist to remove so I didn't. Old Beavers and especially the truckies surely know what happened next, but I'll finish the documentation of the "Situation" so my kids and grandkids learn from me that any rush situation has to be planned and all good care taken at all time. After all, setting fire to a fire truck is not planned by anyone.

John had the carby check-over in hand, backup electric pump working as expected so observing an increased flow by cranking the engine over the next logical step. WRONG, wide open inlet manifold with a "live" ignition did not register as a possible danger to this young rabbit (or goose). Hit the starter button and a huge backfire frightened the living daylights out of me and I dropped the can of fuel onto some rags under it. The resulting fire partially destroyed the steering wheel and the UHF radio above it.

Naturally I leapt out yelling words like "fire, poo. intercourse" etc. John and one of our local staff quickly grabbed the right extinguishers and put out the flames so I could climb back in and turn off the ignition which, of course was still feeding the flames. A very small slap on the wrist and my thanks to the F/Sgt for his support in getting that mother back to the flight line the next day. Rad-Techs fixed the radio and the steering wheel was still useable and replaced with a new one from Oz some weeks later. Oh the fuel flow problem was the failed mechanical pump by the way.



Came back home to Willytown early '71. Marriage failed a couple of years later but life goes on. Have 3 beaut kids and a couple of grandchildren. Back to Fairbairn/5 Sqn choppers at the start of 76. Finally, the senior dropkicks realised that a "truckie" with a few courses under his belt could be useful in a flying squadron. The previous attitude was - "if it didn't fly, could not be part of medical/messing/stores activities, then give it to the truckies". Am I not correct here? Recall the many things we took care of over the 60's to late 80's. Aircraft arrestor barriers, Auxiliary 415 volt radar power supply (along with sparkies), Air conditioning and refrigeration, production of liquid nitrogen and oxygen plants. Aviation fuel quality control and laboratory testing of VIP fuels.



I thoroughly enjoyed my two years in 5 Sqn as a Ground Support Technician working alongside framies. engine fitters and sparkies in the same hanger till I achieved three stripes and was posted across the road to Base Sqn. Transport under W/OFF Bob Pero. Humbleness negates detail but I had some input to the maintenance of the Huey chopper and the ground equipment at the time. I just did my job.

I wore two hats in that final posting at FBN. My primary job was 2/IC of transport maintenance so filled in for Bob, when he finally took some overdue leave, as acting W/Officer, as there was no F/Sgt position there. Those who knew him will understand that things still ran normally when he was away. God rest his soul, as we lost him at age 57 many years ago. My second hat was that of Fuel Quality Control NCO answerable to the 34 SON senior engineering officer directly. Looking back, that was a fairly unique situation for a truckie SGT to be in actually: Oversaw the installation of a 1.1 million litre upgrade of the fuel farm and the building of a new refuelling tanker maintenance hangar with electrically heated floors as well:

Five good years later and near the top of the stud list for a "crown" above the 3 stripes, I was posted back to Willytown but the two F/Sgt's were young or recently posted in so no vacancy was very obvious. I also had a couple of offers of employment and business ventures in the wings if, and when, I wanted to move on. I also had a past CO in DEFAIR who was a good friend as well. I laid my posting situation on him and he rang back an hour or two later with the good and bad news. Yes, I would become a F/SGT within a few months but the reason for the posting was still semi-secret and he could say no more. My 14 year old son wanted to come and live with Dad, so I chose to retire and stay put. I had served for 22 years, 2 months and 6 days when I was discharged upon request.

Apparently, but not confirmed, I had been chosen to go to Willytown to be bought up to speed on the latest GSE of the pending Hornet introduction and a posting to RAAF Tindal would follow. Logical I suppose as I was single, had considerable experience with various support equipment etc, but I was just a humble SGT so the boffins kept me out of the loop for "security reasons". BULLDUST. They lost a keen career-minded worker that day. But life went on.



June '83 saw me move out of engineering and into a wholesale small-goods distribution business which my partner and I built up from a 2 x vehicle, 3 staff operation to a warehouse with 5 x vehicles, 7 x staff and a turnover of more than \$2 million per year. Looking good. Partner moved on with a fair buy-out price to chase the more lucrative funeral business. Still going well 'till the CEO of our major supplier lost the plot and virtually destroyed all of us agents' livelihoods by selling "MAYFAIR" to the opposition. Rather than go broke, I sold a 1/4 million value business for \$70,000 and walked away with just two grand in the bank and a serviceable mortgage. No names of course but the words "Pigs Arse" remind you of someone? And I have no interest in AFL whatsoever.

I took a couple of months off in '87 and toured the eastern/central Australia loop with a bunch of 30 other classic car owners and their families, long before the term "grey nomads" was coined. With the utmost respect to Jim Herron and Kay of course.

That particular rally took 18 months to plan and, as assistant rally director and support mechanic, I was a bit busy at times. It was also used as a travelling "Diabetic Awareness" journey as we had a retired nurse with us to take the message to the out-back communities. Her basic expenses were covered by sponsors. The vehicles ranged from 1932 to a few modern sedans and 4WD's but we did experience a few problems.

We had a problem with our 1938 Dodge – it dropped an exhaust valve. Head off, remove both inlet and exhaust valves for that cylinder completely, head back on with the old gasket. Leave that cylinder's spark plug out and chuff several hundred k's to Port Augusta for a proper repair. The only thing that went wrong on my ultra-reliable 1967 ZA Fairlane was a split seam at the radiator top tank. Out with the oxy bottles and some flux-cored solder. Ask me how we straightened a bent caravan axle in the car park at Uluru, talk about the ingenuity of bush mechanics.



Back to work with the ACT Parks and Conservation for a year as a breakdown mechanic then joined the Protective Service for 10 years (the old Commonwealth Police). Due to the shift work, I had time on my hands so worked for some ex RAAF friends in their catering business. Finally (sort of) fully retired in 2006 as the senior cook training others. Oh in '99 found time to run my brothers transport business after a large machine he was unloading badly crushed his foot and dislocated his shoulder.



I joined the Ulysses Club in '88 (old farts who ride motorbikes) and toured most of OZ on my trusty Suzuki GS 850 shafty. Isn't Tazzy a great place on a comfortable bike?

I need to acknowledge a special lady who has been a friend most of my life. She kept me sane during the very trying times of almost losing my business and was a willing worker during the hectic organisation leading to the Alice Springs car rally. We enjoyed that trip together of course, along with her, then, 7 year old daughter. Although no longer together. we remain good friends to this day. Thanks buddy.



If it has not appeared elsewhere in this journal (and I'm sure I am not alone in this) all Beavers are very grateful to a handful of Beavers who have worked tirelessly for at least 15 years to draw this family together and search out a stud-list of lost members. An amazing effort as we are now one of, if not the most, "in touch" of all appy intakes. In no particular order, thanks to: My Beaver-buddy Warren Dicko, John Gorrie, Russ Cross, Richard Stone, (we all know his real name), Ian Butch, Stick Carlton, and all the others behind the scene including their partners.

The other day I asked a friend how much she spent on a bottle of wine  
to which she replied – about half an hour!



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