

Arthur's Articles.

In my second instalment I intend to carry on where I left off in my first instalment from my book, "Grandad, you're a Legend" when I spoke of my false start to my attestation. "Great Coats on – Great Coats off" was just the beginning. I will pick up my story from my book, slightly edited for non-family General Exhibition.



Considering I wrote this part of my book some seventeen years ago, that section of my story and the original events still seem like they only happened yesterday. 'Attestation'! What an odd word? Yet it is one that the Royal Australian Air Force used back in 1960, and probably still does today, to mean 'the act of enlistment.' While I enjoyed almost twenty-six wonderful years in the RAAF, they were not always without frustration and confusion. Even my attestation fell into the category of frustration and confusion. ([Refer my first article.](#))

Let me take you back to the very beginning.

The General Manager of the Royal Exchange Assurance company in Brisbane had placed me in a managerial career stream, with prospects of promotion. He called me into his office one day and questioned me about my future aspirations when I boldly told him I was waiting to be 'called' into Bible College. That sealed my fate in his insurance company as he immediately withdrew me from the career stream I was in and placed me in what was considered a dead-end job as 'the second' Counter Clerk.



[Footnote: Throughout my Air Force career, I assisted Chaplains and took Sunday services for those Chaplains who needed a 'day off' at several RAAF bases. I also preached in many local churches throughout Australia and overseas. While at my last posting in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, I was co-head of Military Christian Fellowship when I finally responded to my ecclesiastical call and sought my discharge to enter the full-time ministry of the church.

After discharge, I managed several denominational Aged Care Facilities concurrent while pastoring a church in Ipswich, Queensland in my post Air Force career. On retirement, I have been Chaplain to the Sunshine Coast Vietnam Veterans of Australia Association since moving to the Sunshine Coast. For many years, I have also been the Chaplain to many commemorative services, funerals and memorial services arranged by the Caloundra RSL. In the denomination of the church I pastored in Ipswich, I am a Member-at-Large in the Fellowship of Congregational Churches where I assist the church at Goondiwindi in South Western Queensland.

If my former Insurance Company Manger does read this, it took me some twenty-seven years to finally fulfil the call into full-time ministry.]



Back to fifty-nine years ago. Realising that while I was honest about my hopes for the future but being so honest as an eighteen-year-old lad was probably not the smartest thing I could have done. I then had no future in the insurance industry, despite completing Stage One of the Insurance Institute examinations in my first two years in the industry. So, one lunch hour not long thereafter, I walked into the RAAF Recruiting Centre in Mary Street in Brisbane.

My desire since I was in the Air Training Corps (ATC) at High School, of several years' past, was to be in aircrew if I didn't achieve my goal of entering the Christian ministry. Exactly what category in aircrew, I didn't know. I took all the paraphernalia and brochures that the Recruiting Officer's assistant gave me, home to study. I hastily filled in the application form to join the prestigious Royal Australian Air Force.

My thoughts were filled with nothing else. I was so sure I would be accepted, that I am sure my work in my now demoted position of second counter clerk at the Royal Exchange Assurance, incorporated in England with Limited Liability in 1820, was carried out by sheer rote and lacked any enthusiasm whatsoever.

I should mention that I had found out in December of 1959 that I suffered from short sightedness and began to wear spectacles. The application to join the RAAF required a current photograph. Frantically searching through my limited collection of self-portraits, I chose a photograph of me in my Boys' Brigade uniform, sans spectacles, of course. After all, I was applying for a job in the military. Proudly displaying the two white stripes of Corporal in the Boys' Brigade, on my right arm. I was sure that this subtle announcement that I was non-commissioned officer material would surely swing the success of this application in my favour.



I was a late starter in Boys' Brigade. As an older boy, who showed an interest in being a leader in Life Boys, the junior echelon of the Boys Brigade, I rapidly moved through the ranks of Lance Corporal, followed quickly by the rank of Corporal. I attained the rank of Warrant Officer, sometime after the Air Force application went in.

A short while later, the Air Force acknowledged my application. I was called in to Mary Street Recruiting Centre to undergo an initial medical examination. I can still recall the euphoria as I glimpsed my long-held ambition beginning to come to fruition. My slowed, if not completely halted, career in the Insurance industry paled into insignificance. My more recent dreams and aspirations fondly awaiting the call into Bible College also waned and paled into the dimness. "The Air Force wants me! Hang on, Air Force, here I come!"



On arrival in the Recruiting Office in Mary Street, I spent the customary time sitting around with other hopefuls. We participated in all the preliminary tests. I took the bottle into the men's toilet and provided the first of many years of my personal urine specimens to the Medical Orderly. I was measured; I was weighed; and my eyesight was also tested. Even before the Orderly checked my vision, with or without glasses, he announced that I would never be medically fit for aircrew as I wore glasses. My heart sank. My flying career was over before it even began! No amount of logical argument that I wouldn't be flying an aeroplane, succeeded with that all-knowing Medical Orderly. I had applied for entry as a Signaller. Exactly what that entailed, I wasn't sure. I knew the result, after a year's training, was that I would be qualified to fly as aircrew and wear a coveted 'S' brevet. What else did one need to know?

I was taken into a room with all the other hopefuls, and we began a barrage of psychological tests. I remember, I took them in my stride and lapped up the tests. Then we were asked to wait for our individual interviews with the Recruiting Officer. The next few hours, (or were they only minutes?) seemed like an eternity. Finally, my turn came to meet the man whose duty it was to decide my future. I was told very abruptly that I was medically unfit for aircrew; no further debate on that topic! Timidly I asked, "What else have you got?" for I was fairly set at this stage to give up civilian life and join the Air Force, in whatever position I could join, no matter what! No questions asked!

As my civilian occupation was 'Clerk', the Recruiting Officer ran through the many variations of Clerk employed in the RAAF; Clerk Financial Accounting; Clerk General; Clerk Administrative; Clerk - Medical; Clerk Equipment; and just plain Clerk. All sub-categories other than 'Clerk' required further training after basic recruit course. The thought ran through my head that to accept any of these clerical positions would be to exchange one occasionally boring career in the insurance industry for a similar (possibly) boring career in the Air Force. At least, in the Air Force, I'd have the glamour of the uniform and the possibility to see the world, and probably a bit more of Australia. Enticing? But not convincing! I probed further, "What else have you got?"

Television had just been introduced to Queensland the year before. Most homes had not attained the status of owning a TV. Television was new. If a friend had a set, their circle of friends grew overnight. Many a night was passed standing on the footpath outside one of the major electrical retail stores in the City of Brisbane, viewing this new phenomena and taking in all the exciting westerns like 'Rawhide' and 'Ponderosa' and comedy shows such as 'I love Lucy' and 'The Jackie Gleason Show'.



With this as a backdrop, the Recruiting Officer said, "We have limited vacancies for Radio Technician," and expounded the virtues of learning to undertake radio repairs on the eve of this exciting new advent of television. Somehow that made sense to me. Little did I know then what I now know that Recruiters have quotas to fill for all up-coming courses. On this day, the closing date for Radio training must have been looming and the Recruiter must have noticed the glimmer of interest in my eye and poured the tap on, so to speak, expounding the many advantages of being a Radio Trainee. "The course will be held at the School of Radio, RAAF Base Laverton. You will really enjoy it," he assured me. Coincidentally, it



is the same school I would have gone to if my original application for Signaller continued its pathway through the system.

The Recruiting Officer changed my application from Aircrew Trainee (Signaller) to 'Radio Mechanic – Trainee' and shuffled me out of his office to ask any further questions of his aide. I recall asking the fresh recruiting Aircraftsman, "Where is this Laverton where I would do my technical training?" The AC, a 'waiting for training' AC, turned to a map of Australia and after cross referencing all the given information found 'Laverton' right in the middle of Western Australia and confidently announced to me that is where my radio training would take place, in the middle of WA, in the middle of nowhere. Without question from this learned informant, I headed for home, secure in the knowledge that I didn't get what I asked for, but did I get second best. I also looked forward to seeing the interior of Western Australia!



The next step in this saga of 'Attestation' should have warned me of what was to be part of military life for the next almost twenty-six years. Misinformation and confusion; The Royal run around; 'Great Coats on! Great coats off' syndrome! Not long after my big day with the Recruiter, I received a letter in the mail telling me my application was successful and to report to the Recruiting Office on 20th of August 1960. What excitement! I was in the Air Force! I hastily resigned from the Royal Exchange Assurance. Number Two, Front-Office Counter Clerk was again the worry of the General Manager of the Royal Exchange Assurance, not mine.

I told you about the first mix-up when three hopefuls attended Mary Street Recruiting Centre with luggage, ready for swearing in, in my last column. But eventually, all was sorted out. My Attestation Date was set for 24th August 1960. Again, I set off to Brisbane with my battered old suitcase, which in those days, I called a port, before I travelled broadly and understood that port was something one drank, not carried their luggage in, or a berth to tie up a ship. The next twenty-five and a half years was to be one long learning experience.

At 2.00 pm on the 24th August in the year of our Lord, 1960, I lined up with five other aspirant recruits. Allan was coming in as a direct tradesman. He was a middle-aged spray painter. He had a brother who was already in the RAAF. Ray was from Redcliffe and he was coming in, to train at Wagga Wagga for one of the technical trades; Airframe, Engines Armament, Electrical, Instruments or Transport Fitter. He wouldn't know which direction his life would take him until he completed his basic technical training, which depended on how he achieved the metal filing test, along with which trade was in short supply, would reveal his future mustering.

The other two, (both named Peter,) were already radio tradesmen with the Postmaster General's Department. The PMG was the forerunner of Telstra. The two Peters had only to complete the equipment-specific part of their Radio Course at Radio School and would graduate long before I ever started. We all held a small bible in our right hand and raising the bible slightly in the air, we repeated words after a recruiting office staff member, which was construed to be our Oath of



Allegiance to Her Majesty, the Queen of England, in the days before she became Queen of Australia as well.

Eureka! I was in the Royal Australian Air Force. I repeated aloud my service number - A 19871. Aircraftsman (Recruit) Arthur William Fry.

In the next edition, I'll take you with me on my train journey from the Mary Street Recruiting Centre to RAAF Base Rathmines, for my basic recruit course and my introduction to the 'real' Air Force to which I had 'attested' the next six years of my life. {But...didn't he say he was in the RAAF for almost twenty-six years?}

Memories of RAAF People Who Influenced Me

This quarter, I'd like to introduce a new segment, mentioning people who have greatly influenced me during my Air Force career. In this edition, I'd like to remember Clive King, an Air Force Chaplain who rose to the rank of Principal Air Chaplain. Clive was, and is, a clergyman who I had the privilege of serving with and assisting him in the Chapels at Point Cook and at Amberley.

In 1976, we were both serving at Base Squadron, Point Cook when I had the unfortunate experience of spending several weeks in hospital, firstly at No. 6 RAAF Hospital at Laverton, then Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital on the other side of Melbourne. You could be forgiven if you thought you were on a chess board at Point Cook, for Base Squadron's Commanding Officer was a Bishop, our Chaplain was a King, and our Officers' Mess Cook was a Knight. I guess I was just a 'Pawn' in the middle of all things and threatened Headquarters Point Cook as my Castle! Every day of the week, Clive would drive my wife, Annette, over to see me in Heidelberg while I was in Intensive Care and then in the general ward. On the days Clive was unavailable to make the journey, Base Radio Officer at Point Cook, 'Jumbo' Jordan would take Annette across busy Melbourne to visit me.

I will never forget how Clive and 'Jumbo' made that difficult time in our lives so much better by their kindness and care, and deep concern for their fellow RAAF members. Clive and his wife, Chris, became good friends of the Fry family both at Point Cook and Amberley, where we spent many happy occasions at each other's homes. Clive and Chris were guests at our surprise twenty-fifth Wedding Anniversary, now thirty years ago, secretly organised by our son, Ash, and our son-in-law, Grant Couchman, a 'framie' at Amberley. They had secretly travelled all over Australia to make a video for the occasion, made with our friends from previous RAAF postings, who couldn't come to Ipswich for that milestone event.



They had secretly travelled all over Australia to make a video for the occasion, made with our friends from previous RAAF postings, who couldn't come to Ipswich for that milestone event.

The King and Fry families on holiday from Point Cook at Ipswich, Christmas 1978. Chris is second from the left at rear; Clive at the rear; Annette is between Chris and Clive. Their daughters, Kathy and Fiona, are on the right. The rest are the Fry children and Annette's mother.



Clive and Chris have lived in Turramurra in Sydney for many years in retirement. It has been our privilege to visit them on a few occasions. We keep in touch regularly, via the internet and Clive told me recently that he is slowing down from his local parish work where he spends his retirement as he did in the Air Force, ably caring for others.

Clive will never know how grateful we were and are, for his support and care during a difficult time in our lives. Once 'medically repaired', I returned to my new posting at No. 1 Flying Training School at Point Cook as the Admin / Air Force Law instructor, for three memorable years. After my hospitalization, I enjoyed another ten years of rewarding RAAF life, and some tremendous, (read, 'exotic',) overseas postings! [More on that later!]

Thank you, Clive King. Thank you, 'Jumbo' Jordan.

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Queensland Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist NSW Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Queensland Region." I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative Baptist Queensland Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist North Queensland Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist North Queensland Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" and pushed him over.

The Great Ocean Road

The Great Ocean Road is one of Australia's most scenic drives. Winding its way along 243 kilometres of Victoria's rugged south-west coast, it attracts millions of visitors each year. But what many do not realise is that the road was built as a permanent memorial to those who died during the First World War, making it the largest war memorial in the world.

Carved from wild and windswept cliffs overlooking the Southern Ocean, the Great Ocean road was built by 3,000 returned servicemen fresh from the trenches of the Western Front in memory of their fallen comrades. "It was just an idea that was floated by a couple of men," said Dr Meleah Hampton, an historian at the Australian War Memorial. "They had long wanted a road to connect all of these coastal towns in southern Victoria so they floated it as an idea for using the manpower of these returned servicemen and then they decided: 'If we are going to do it, let's make it a memorial.'

It was a huge endeavour.



At the time of the First World War, the remote south-west coast of Victoria was accessible only by sea or rough tracks through dense bush. The whole focus has been on sending men away to fight, and one day they would have 350,000 men back from overseas and as time went by it dawned on people that these men were going to have to integrate back into society. What were they going to do with them? How were they going to avoid civil unrest? How were they going to avoid having dissatisfied men roaming the streets? and how were they going to avoid all sorts of other social problems?



People start turning their thoughts to how they are going to manage this and the Great Ocean Road was born out of that situation of fear and worry about what civil Australian society was going to look like after the war."



The Memorial Arch, spanning the Great ocean Road.



The chairman of the Country Roads Board in Victoria, William Calder, proposed the repatriation and re-employment of returned soldiers working on roads in sparsely populated areas in the Western District. The men who are coming home were just a little bit worried too so the AIF put in place things like education programs and there were discussions about what their options would be.

A plan for what was described as the 'South Coast Road' was formed, starting at Barwon Heads, near Geelong, it would follow the coast around Cape Otway, and end up near Warrnambool.

As they are putting forward the idea, Australians were launching the battle of Amiens (August 1918) and sadly it was realised that there would be fewer men to come home. The idea of building the road was put on the back burner until Geelong mayor, Alderman Howard Hitchcock, who first saw its potential as a tourist attraction for the region, brought the plans to fruition. He formed the Great Ocean Road Trust and set about raising the money to finance the project. He saw it not only as a way of employing returned soldiers, but of creating a lasting monument to those who had died during the war.

The Great Ocean Road Trust managed to secure £81,000 in capital (about \$7.3Mil today) from private subscription and borrowing, with Hitchcock himself contributing £3,000. Money would be repaid by charging drivers a toll until the debt was cleared and the road would then be gifted to the state, connecting isolated settlements on the coast and becoming a vital transport link for the timber industry and tourism. Survey work began in August 1918, but the difficult terrain, dense wilderness and bad weather hampered the project.

Construction work officially began in September 1919, but progress was slow with workers achieving around three kilometres a month as most of the work was done by hand. Sometimes there were hundreds of men working on it, and sometimes there are just 10 or 20.



For their efforts, the returned soldiers were paid ten shillings and sixpence per day (about \$47.50 today), significantly more than the six shillings they received in the Army, making the project a popular one. Through rugged terrain, wild weather and steep rocky cliffs, the soldiers worked for eight hours per day, and slept 'rough' in the bush, sleeping out in old army tents in tent cities that moved along with the road. Construction was done by hand using picks and shovels as well as explosives, wheelbarrows, and horse-drawn carts. The work was at times extremely dangerous, with numerous workers killed on the job; the final sections along the steep coastal mountains being the most difficult to work on.

The survey team would go in ahead to survey the next bit of the road to be built and the men who were building it would come in behind them. There are stories of the men going forward in carts with explosive detonators on their laps so that they wouldn't jiggle around too much on the road.

On 18 March 1922, the first section of the road, from Eastern View (where the ANZAC soldier sculpture can be viewed today) to Lorne, was officially opened with due pomp and ceremony. It would be another ten years before the section from Lorne to Apollo Bay was finished, officially marking its completion. The road was officially opened in November 1932 with Victoria's



Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Irvine holding a ceremony near Lorne's Grand Pacific Hotel. They managed to put together 30 odd cars for the opening and in 1932 hardly anybody had cars, so that was a big deal in itself.



At the time, The Age newspaper reported that: "In the face of almost insurmountable odds, the Great Ocean Road has materialised from a dream or 'wild-cat scheme', as many dubbed it, into concrete reality."

The Geelong mayor, Howard Hitchcock, who was the really important driver of the whole project, died of heart disease on 22 August 1932, just before it was opened. His car was driven behind the governor's in the procession along the road during the opening ceremony. A memorial was constructed in his name on the road at Mount Defiance, near Lorne, and he is still affectionately considered the Father of the Road.

Not long after the opening a toll was put in place to recoup construction costs for the road. Visitors were charged two shillings (\$9 today) for cars, and 10 shillings (\$45 today) for wagons with more than two horses, payable as they passed through Eastern View where the memorial arch was erected. The toll was abolished when the trust handed the road over as a gift to the State Government in 1936, with the deed for the road presented to the Victorian Premier at a ceremony at the Cathedral Rock toll gate. It was a really dangerous road for quite a long time, there weren't a lot of places to turn out, passing was really difficult, and it was often a one car road, but that's because it was built by men with picks and shovels on the edge of cliffs overlooking the sea.



In 1962, the road was deemed by the Tourist Development Authority to be one of the world's great scenic roads and in 2011, it was added to the Australian National Heritage List.

19 September 2019 marked 100 years from the day construction commenced on the Great Ocean Road.



Dear Mother-in-law, "Don't lecture me how to handle my children. I am living with one of yours and he needs a lot of improvement!"