

## Arthur's Articles.

### 3 AD Amberley

In our [last edition](#), our readers saw five graduates of No. 28 Radio Mechanics course leave RAAF Base Laverton, heading for Amberley. Sadly, Tim Gear never made it. Johnno and Monty started their Radio Mechanic career at 'the Wing', No 82 Wing which comprised Nos. 1, 2 and 6 Squadrons, all flying Canberra's. 'Fletch, the 'Clermont Kid' headed for Base Squadron while I went to No. 3 Aircraft Depot (3AD) where the major 'E' servicing for Canberra and Sabre aircraft were done, as well as the shorter servicing for the Depot's single Dakota and sole Vampire.



Canberra



Sabre



Vampire

As was the usual path for Radio Mechanics at 3AD fresh out of Radio School, the first half of my tour was at the hangars while the last half of my tour, before heading back to Radio School to complete the training on the Radio Technician's course, was spent back at the main Radio Section away from the hangars.

I guess the Air Force chose skinny guys like me to be able to work on the Sabres, for instance, as their radio bay was on the side of the fuselage and so small that only a skinny kid like me could manoeuvre their small bodies into such a small space to retrieve the radio equipment that resided in there.

It was a great introduction to working on Australia's front-line fighters and bombers, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Between the Sabre and the Canberra hanger stood an old Lincoln bomber. It was rumoured that this aircraft had been the one that dropped the bomb at Monte Bello. It stood on a white painted concrete pad and no one ever went near it for the fear of radiation was still strong.



Years later, I was given the task of accompanying a member of the Australian Radiation Laboratories around the old site of the 3AD hangars and the 'hot' Lincoln. This guy was the typical



man for the job. He wore a safari suit and on his head was a matching 'Tiger Shooter' pith helmet. Although removed many years before, we found the old building that was the NCDC hut. We found the site of the old Lincoln with evidence of the drain that carried rainwater that fell off the aircraft into this drain and where that drain entered the earth.



We also found other evidence where the clothing worn for those who observed the blast which was boiled in a copper then buried in a long trench. When we went back to his room, I asked him how dangerous that radiation may be today, or rather back then, some forty years ago. He laughed and put his probe up to the fluorescent light which gave a noticeably higher reading than we had detected at the old Lincoln site or the pit that held the boiled clothes.

Not much happened of noteworthiness at 3 AD. All trades worked out of a large hut run by a Sergeant Engine Fitter. I recall one day he announced that the untidiness of the hut in general declared him to announce, "This hut needs a sweep!" So in one of my first claims at being the 'Village Idiot' of the Unit, I drew up some tickets and sold them as the Sergeant had requested, "This place needs a sweep," so I gave him a sweep!

I remember I lived in 'H' block at Amberley which was in the airmen's living in quarters. But I did not spend much time there.

While at 3AD, I was invited by a Radio Mechanic (Ground) from a course ahead of mine that had been posted to Base Radio at Amberley. He found a church in Ipswich where he met, then later married a girl. This pair have shared many postings with us then we have caught up after we both took discharge. Altogether, we have been friends for sixty years. Colin Rose became a Warrant Officer Radio Technician then commissioned as a Radio Officer. Jen, his wife, is senior to me by two days and we have tried to celebrate our birthdays on the day in between for many years.



*Colin and Jen Rose with Annette and Arthur Fry at 2 Squadron RAAF Association Plaque dedication at Caloundra RSL on 20 July 2017*



Colin invited me into his then girlfriend, (later, his wife's) church at Silkstone, in Ipswich for a Christian Endeavor evening meal and meeting. "You'll only need to bring a knife and fork," Colin told me, but I came away with much more! On 'Night One', I met this beautiful girl, and she has been my wife for fifty-six years this December after we courted for three years.

I used to go home every weekend from Amberley to attend my home church and Christian Endeavour. I wrote in my Memoires when Colin invited me into a Wednesday evening Christian Endeavour meeting, "I guess another dose of Christian Endeavour each week won't hurt me!"

Courting Annette saw my visits to my home in Brisbane decrease, as well as fewer and fewer evenings were spent in the loneliness of my room in 'H' Block at Amberley. I also spent less time with my Radio School mates, Johnno, Monty and Fletch. Johnno had purchased a fabulous old Mark IV Jaguar, the one with the separate silver headlights. Except for Annette's appearance on the scene, I would have no doubt been with them at the Lowood car races one Sunday when as they returned to Amberley, they were involved in a serious road smash that put the three of them in hospital, and dispatched that beautiful old cream Jaguar Mark IV saloon to the wrecker's yard.



At the halfway mark of my posting, I was moved back to the main radio section. Workwise, I moved from taking radio equipment out of the aircraft that was sent to the main radio section and replacing that with equipment that had just been serviced. I recall, all radio equipment had to be lock-wired in, and I recall lock-wiring in my sleep!

Being part-way qualified as a radio serviceman, my main job in the main radio section was to refurbish, (read re-paint,) the boxes that contained the essential radio gear, as well as the larger Doppler antennas that were the state of art verification equipment of the day. A Radio Mechanic or a spray painter, I was never quite sure who I was.

While at the main radio section, I studied for and gained two major steps in my radio career. I became an LAC Radio Mechanic and completed the examination to return to Radio School on my Radio Technician's course, however, life in Radio Section produced four incredible stories that opened for me the magic of camaraderie that existed in the military.

Let me tell you four of them:

### **The Great Race**

I had run in the Inter-Unit sports for 3AD, as I had run at school and considered myself a bit of a sprinter up to the 440 yards level. Flush with my success at the recent Inter-Unit sports event at Amberley, one of our section's corporals, Des, a guy who would bet on anything, sparked interest



in a competition between a known sprinter, (me), and a middle aged, porky bloke, (Des), with a medium radio mechanic, (Anthony, known as 'Mario', and later my Groomsman at our wedding), on his back. The sprinter would start at 100 yards, while Des and Mario would start their jog from 50 yards.

We ran on the tarmac outside of Radio section. The whole unit turned out. Money flowed into the 'bookies' purse liberally. We had a starter with a starters pistol. "Ready, set, [Fire]". I took off like a rocket. Des jogged with Mario on his back. I reached the 99-yard mark as Des and Mario crossed the finishing line. Des did not prompt me, but I swore if I had another stride, I could have beaten them, which was exactly what Des wanted to hear.



He opened a new book while we were all gathered, and money came flowing out into the bookie's hands. Work was put on hold throughout the AD as I

gathered my breath and we lined up again. "Ready, Set, [Fire]". I ran like there was no tomorrow. Same result. Des and Mario limped over the line just a 'nose' away.

Des and his 'bookie' offered another race to see if the losers could regain their money, but strangely enough, not one punter was game to try again. Later, Des revealed that it was an impossible task, but I have never been part of a re-run to prove him wrong!

### **Anyone There?**

Private phone calls were allowed on the radio section phone in those days. One day, I was called to the phone by one of the corporals, who held out the phone for me. "Call for you" he said. I slid the phone up to my ear. "Hello. Hello." But there was no answer. I changed the phone to the other ear, sliding it up my face to my ear again. "Hello, hello, anyone there?" No answer, so I hung up. Someone had laced the earpiece with graphite grease, and I walked around the section all day, and even went to lunch, with two great streaks of graphite grease up both sides of my face and throughout both ears.

### **Corporals' Bicycles.**

They say 'Rank has its Privileges', or so it seemed at 3AD Radio Section. Once promoted to Corporal, all Radio Technicians in Radio Section were issued with a yellow bicycle. There was a bike rack outside the section where the bikes were stored while their owners were working slavishly away inside the building. Lunch time came, and the Corporals rode their bikes to lunch while the LAC Technicians and the Radio Mechanics, walked to lunch.



With a fair smattering of stirrers among the non-Corporal fraternity and an unending supply of lock-wire, pranks were sure to abound. As a Corporal pulled his bicycle out from the rack, several other bikes would follow as some little 'prankster' had lock-wired the spokes of all the bikes in the row. One out, all out!

Often as we marched to lunch, I would hear the muffled cry coming from the bike racks, "Fry, you are responsible for this!" Quite unfair, as others often beat me to it!

### Craven 'A'

One day Corporal Des came into the section and announced that the night before, he lit up a Craven A cigarette, and found a piece of wood in his 'smoke'. He said he had written to Craven 'A' and expected a case of cigarettes back in return for his inconvenience.

Day after day, the section enquired as to the progress of his expected remuneration. No news. One night, I drove to Brisbane to a friend who I knew smoked Craven 'A' cigarettes. I had him half smoke a cigarette; stomp it out and give it to me. I then found a type-writer for there were no laptops in those days, and wrote a letter, ostensibly from Craven 'A', along the lines that we sometimes receive letters such as his from 'cranks' who do not appreciate a decent brand of cigarette, and stated that we enclosed a replacement cigarette. Of course, that replacement was the half-smoked butt from my friend.



My letter arrived at the Radio Section. Des read the letter. He called out, "Fry, you are behind this," which of course I vehemently denied. "I don't smoke, let alone Craven 'A'." A week or so later, a fresh face young lad arrived at the front door of the Radio Section and asked for Des. He came to the door and the lad said beamingly, "I am from Craven 'A'." Des replied, "Rubbish," (or colourful words to that effect,) "You are one of Fry's stupid mates!" With that, the lad pointed out the Ford Falcon panel van with the words, "Craven 'A' emblazoned on the side of the vehicle.

Des had to guffaw and eat humble pie. The representative, however, gave Des a free packet of cigarettes. He came back into the section and bawled me out, "If it hadn't had been for you, I would have received a whole carton of cigarettes!"

I will never forget the camaraderie, or call it 'stirring', if you prefer, that went on in the Radio Section at 3AD back in 1961 to 1963. Yes, my first posting in the real Air Force certainly held some wonderful memories for me, not to mention that while at 3AD, I met my wife. She, on the other hand, may curse the Air Force for posting young Aircraftsman Arthur Fry to No. 3 Aircraft Depot at Amberley.



### People of Note in my RAAF Career

One of my close associates, sadly no longer with us, was an RAAF Police Officer who rose to the position of Provost Marshal of the RAAF, Neville Clarke.



*Neville Clarke in Vung Tau 1971*



*Neville Clarke, Mrs Hai & Arthur Fry outside Police Section*

I had the privilege of serving under Neville in Vung Tau in Vietnam in 1971. In Vung tau, he held the position of Assistant Provost Marshal for the Australian Forces, Vietnam. I also caught up with Nev when he was at Operational Command in Glenbrook at the end of my RAAF career. Nev had a task of opening a double locked safe that had been compromised while being set. Nev asked for my help, adding that I was the greatest crook at safe cracking that he knew! That was quite a gag for the life I had tried to live and the ecclesiastical career I was to follow when I left the Air Force. Dare I tell you that between us, we were successful in opening the dual locked safe!

Prior to joining the RAAF, Nev was a Senior Constable in the Queensland Police Service. After our time in Vietnam where I worked in his Police Section as an interpreter, he included me in all Police section work and social events.

On our return to Australia, we both lived in the Laverton/ Werribee area, and we caught up socially. I invited Nev and his wife to join us at a function, wearing mess kit, at the Point Cook Mess. We called at his home to collect them. I was a newly commissioned officer. When Nev opened his door, he pretended to brush the bar off my epaulette, saying, "Sorry, Lad, I thought you had a thread on your shoulder!" Funny man.

After I left the Air Force, we went back to Hong Kong in the early nineties. Nev was Provost Marshal at the time. We were invited to a British 'free-for-all' banquet except it was not that free at HMS Tamar, the British Forces Headquarters at that time. Nev and his wife arrived in the Colony late in the evening, and after changing into his mess kit, they came directly to HMS Tamar. In those days, we had a habit of wearing a white shirt under our mess kit jacket with parts that were not seen with the jacket on, decorated with Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck or camouflage for some (Army types), and sporting the loudest braces we could find. When the time came to remove jackets, all these fancy shirts and loud braces would be revealed.



A local British radio announcer displayed the loudest braces that I had ever seen. Nev said to me, "I like them. I am going to have them!" Time passed and much later in the morning, just before dawn, we came across Nev again - wearing the radio announcer's braces! As I said, Nev was a character. Smooth talker for that would have been the only way he purloined the radio announcer's braces!

When I left Vietnam, Nev organised then presented me with a beautiful plaque which thanked me for the service I had rendered to the RAAF Police Section while in Vung Tau. I have treasured that plaque which proudly hangs in my study to this day. Vale old friend. You were great officer and a good mate. Rest in Peace.



The plaque presented to Arthur Fry by Neville Clarke and his Police Section in Vung Tau, South Vietnam in 1971

A treasured memory of a tremendous bloke.



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