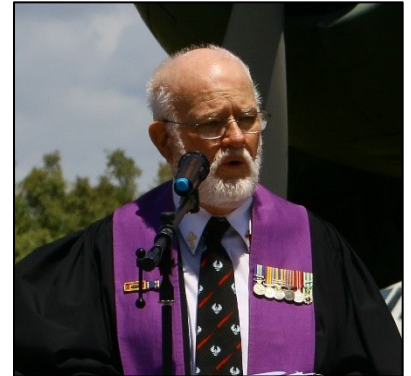


Arthur's Articles.

This chapter in my life will be the hardest to write about, but I intend to include it in my historical walk through my Air Force career, for it ultimately put me on the path to the marvellous RAAF career that I enjoyed for almost twenty-six years, but also taught me one of the greatest lesson in my life that I have ever learned, that is, that when you are ahead, learn to shut your big trap, and enjoy the benefits you find yourself in.



What am I trying to say? My sojourn at Radio School, Laverton, for my Technician's conversion course did not finish as planned and just weeks from graduation, I was ignominiously booted out of Radio School. Those events and circumstances which follow, may not be enthralling reading, but as I say, they taught me the greatest lesson in my life which I graciously accepted and have followed the newfound principles ever since.

In the previous edition of our magazine, I told how Colin Rose had introduced me to the church in Ipswich where he met his wife, Jenny, and that Annette attended the same church. Annette and I had courted for two years as I approached my expected return to Radio School to undergo my Technician conversion course.



Colin and Jenny had married prior to the Easter of 1963 and had been posted from Amberley to Radio School, when a week later, he had received a posting to Base Squadron, Townsville, as a Radio Technician, (Ground). We were to see them on different postings throughout our respective



careers, and on retirement, our paths crossed again, and we have renewed our long-standing friendship as we retired to and live on the Sunshine Coast.

The month after Jenny and Colin were married, I received the posting that Annette and I had wished to be delayed as we plotted a future together. I sold my vehicle to save money while away at Radio School for our impending marriage, sometime in the not-too-distant future. She fended off a barrage of possible local suitors who wanted to know what her intentions were as I headed off to Laverton.

She clearly told all interested potential boyfriends that she had planned to wait for me and continue our eighteen-month romance via letter writing. The (single) male population of our church, went into morbid grief! For Annette was then, as she is now, an exceptionally beautiful girl and as one of my more recent staff once commented, 'a very elegant lady'.

Car-less, the Air Force sent me off to Melbourne by train in mid May 1963. Radio School posting Mark Two was different to my Radio Mechanics Course there. Classrooms were in 'Tin City', but the living quarters for Technician Trainees were in Block 100, an old wooden two storey block close to the Airmen's Mess.



There were no evening gatherings in the ASCO Canteen as with Radio Mechanic students who mixed socialisation with the little night-time study that we did on that course. My love life saw copious letters written to Annette each night, so much so, that I often needed two envelopes to convey all that I had written to her, including poems written just for her! Life was serious. We



planned to be married, so study had a further incentive. Become a Technician, which meant more money coming into the newly-weds' household.

The Technician's course was made up of a different type of airman. Most lived out, having been married during their Mechanic time in the field. There was no socializing or class bonding of a weekend. The few 'singles' or those who had been unable to bring their wives or partners to a 'B' Grade posting, lived in Block 100, but mainly kept to themselves. In short, there was no camaraderie that we had known on our Mechanic's course, more was the pity.



The course was progressing well. Most of us seemed to be coping and none had been excluded from Radio School. That is, until just two weeks prior to the end of the course. The first to receive the 'chop' was....me!

In the latter days of the course, we were into the equipment's phase. We all had passed one phase, but smart Alec Arthur queried the staff on a question, rather vehemently and in my usual, 'I believe I know better than you' attitude, pursued the matter on every occasion I could. I recall uttering the pugilistic phrase, "How many times does a student know more than the Instructor?" What an obnoxious 21-year-old I must have been in the sight of the instructors.

Fortunately, in my time in front of a class some years later, at Flying Training School where I was the Admin and Air Force Law Instructor, no argumentative student ever pulled the same attack on me.

I still feel very remorseful for the poor teacher I drew into my personal conflict. The Flight Sergeant was a wonderful, quiet, and helpful Radio Technician who was nearing the end of a long and illustrious career in two Air Forces. At first, he clung to the official head-office line that 'no correspondence will be entered into', but as I persisted, he took the matter up to his superiors. He came back into the classroom and said that if I could prove my case, I could have the answer marked correct. I did this with glee. I had won my argument. The staff would not be able to deny that. The Flight Sergeant returned to the classroom later and conceded the point. He also was confounded why I had been so obstinate in pushing my cause, as the altered mark made no difference to my Pass, let alone anyone else in the class.



What was all the fuss over? It was a multi-choice question. "At what height will this equipment operate? A. 30 feet. B. 300 feet. C. 3,000 feet. D. Almost a mile." In later life, I had undertaken the RAAF School of Technical Training's Instructional Technique course before being let loose on the aspirant pilots at No. 1 FTS. I was taught how to set a multi-choice examination. This question was a classic. The correct answer is obviously C. 3,000 feet. (All of my readers got that didn't you?)

However, I had read the manual for this equipment from cover to cover. (I mean, all that time in Block 100 was not taken up solely writing letters to my Dear One!) The rear of the book stated, 'That although this equipment usually works at a maximum of 3,000 feet, it has been known to operate at 5,000 feet.' Now when I went to school, 5,280 feet equalled one mile, and therefore, the correct answer, in my opinion, and according to the very manual we were studying, should be 'almost a mile'.

The matter ended. I received no accolades from my classmates for 'beating the system', but I quietly gloated to myself that 'I had won that argument', silly lad, that I was.

I should add here that the marking system in Radio School was by 'class average'. It was a system I never fully understood, in that I concluded that all scores from students were added then a differential applied, and as I used to say, then 'take away the number you first thought of', and from that, a Pass mark was set; a Supplementary Fail mark was set, and a Fail mark was set. A 'Supplementary Fail' meant that you had to re-sit the examination. A 'Fail' saw you suspended from the course and sent on your way as a Radio Mechanic, with little or no hope of ever returning to have a second attempt at becoming a Radio Technician.



In the next week's examination on the ILS equipment. Two of us received a 'Supplementary Fail'. I recall that because the class average was in force, even 93% dropped us into the 'Supp. Fail' category.

The dear old Flight Sergeant came back into the room after the results were given and crossed out the 'S' on my sheet and wrote 'F'. He added, "Sorry, lad. 'They' are making me do this!" I was devastated but shrugged my shoulders and thought that I had brought this on myself. If I had shut my big mouth when I had been clearly ahead in the dispute of the precious week, the 'S' mark would not have been changed.

That was probably the most ignominious moment in my twenty-six-year RAAF history. However, as crushing as that was, it was a turning point in my life to tell me to assess any situation as to the consequences before you speak. Further, even though you know you are right and can prove it, that always is not the best time to display your knowledge over another person's understanding of the situation. That principle has kept me in line ever since.

Secondly, if I had not been evicted from the Radio Technician course, I probably would not have sought my next career, that of a military Linguist in which I became proficient in Chinese (Mandarin) and Vietnamese, careers which were most fulfilling and productive as I climbed up the rank ladder in the Air Force to a most successful and satisfying career.



A few days later, my posting came through to 10 Squadron, RAAF Base Garbutt, (which was what RAAF Base Townsville was called then.) Without a vehicle. I was to travel from Melbourne to Townsville by train, with the concession that I was to sleep sitting up from Melbourne to Brisbane for two nights, but the third and fourth night, I could have a sleeper.



I applied for and received permission to stop over in Brisbane for a day mid-journey so that I could see Annette and discuss plans to see us move ultimately to Townsville where our friends, Colin and Jenny were. After a short 24 hours, I was back on the train, which entertained me as I watched the locals at Saint Lawrence come out to the train with their billy cans to collect their daily ration of milk. In New Zealand, milk comes from Bulls, but in Queensland, milk comes from trains, I discovered!



10 Squadron flew the Neptune P2V7's. My Radio Section Sergeant supported me in trying to get back to Radio School to finish the remainder of my course, and he enthusiastically taught me the job I would be doing on the Neptune's until I returned to Radio School.

I was in Townsville for less than three weeks, when one of my former classmates, a guy by the nickname of 'Johnny Thunder' sent me a telegram stating that he too had slipped at the last post in the final exams and had been posted to 16 Army Light Aircraft Squadron at Amberley. He invited me to do an exchange posting with him! 16 ALA? Teeny Weeny Airlines? I had heard



they are always away on exercise.... but I would be closer to Annette. Townsville held unknown prospects! Maybe Annette could endure the heat in Townsville? Hundreds of questions popped in and out of my head.

Finally, I drafted a reply to 'Johnny Thunder'. It simply said, "No". I headed into the Post Office at Townsville which was where you sent telegrams from in those days. On the way into town, the pendulum swung from "No" to 'Yes" and from "Yes" to "No". I entered the Post Office just on closing time. I headed to the bench where I grabbed a telegram pro-forma, and wrote the one word, "Yes", with the thought running through my over-worked brain, 'Annette would never understand if I sent "No" '.



The exchange posting was approved, and within days, I was travelling back to Amberley, at my own expense, may I add, to begin an intriguing chapter in my military career that would be my last Radio Mechanic posting, at 16 Army Light Aircraft Squadron, Amberley. My days at 16 ALA will be enunciated in my next edition. While at 16 ALA, Annette and I were engaged the month after I came down from Townsville and married in Ipswich the following December. As anticipated, I never saw much of her during my time at 16 ALA because we were always away, either on exercises or to service an aircraft that had run out of flying hours to get back to Amberley. Those exciting times will be explained next month.

But my 10 Squadron Sergeant had also worked behind the scenes and he had plugged for me to return to Radio School to finish my Tech course, (and hoped for me to shut my big mouth on my next occasion at Radio School.) I had been advised to expect a posting back to Radio School very soon.

At the same time, at ALA, out of a radio section of five, the Sergeant, the Corporal and I had applied to do the aptitude test in Brisbane for the following year's courses at the RAAF School of



Languages. The tests were interesting, and I enjoyed them for I had a liking and fascination towards languages, having done French and Latin at High School. To this day, I can remember much from those two languages. (One of my party pieces is to sing 'God save the Queen' in Latin. - Aren't you lucky this article does not have voice?)

I was called to the ALA Orderly Room in the October of 1964 and was told my posting had come through with effect January 1965. I quickly resigned myself that this was to be my last Christmas at Amberley with Annette for a while, before I finished my last stay at Radio School when the Orderly Room Sergeant advised me that my posting was not to Radio School but to the RAAF School of Languages. I further found out that it was a 'Live-in' course for twelve months and I would not be given leave to marry in the February as planned.

From then on, there was a panic to alter the date of our wedding to a time before we left for Point Cook. Annette and I married on the 19th of December 1964.

Next issue: Thirteen months with Teeny Weeny Airlines as an RAAF Radio Mechanic servicing Army aircraft, Sioux, and Cessna's, flown by Army pilots.

Impressive People I met in my Air Force Career

The first Chaplain who served at No. 2 Squadron when it arrived in Phan Rang, South Vietnam in April 1967 was Father Terry Canzer who concluded his Air Force career a few months later and returned to his Diocese in Toowoomba. Father Ganzer was replaced by Father Patrick 'Paddy' John McCormick.

I had the privilege of serving with both Chaplains, as the unit Interpreter. I travelled with both often. Under the 'Winning Hearts and Minds of the People' program, we supported an Orphanage, as well as two villages, one a Vietnamese village, Cong Thanh, and the other side by side village, a Cham village, Thanh Y. The Chams were the original settlers of the area around Phan Rang, and while the two races were cordial to each other, it was a case of 'never the twain shall meet'.

Whatever we donated to the Vietnamese Village, we had to donate the same equivalent to the Cham Village. When we provided medical services for the Vietnamese village, we had to provide the same services to the Cham Village.

Father Pat, as did Father Terry, as well as the RAAF Medical Officer on his visits, rode along with me to conduct these visits. Another RAAF Chaplain I worked with in Vung Tau and later in Point Cook, when re-settling Vietnamese refugees, said often, "I can't speak Vietnamese or Chinese, but Arthur can. I do the thinking as Arthur can't think!" (And to avoid embarrassment to my dear friend, Rodger, I will not mention his name!)





No matter what time an aircrew took off in a Canberra, Father Pat was there to see them off and give the crew a blessing before the Canberra's door was shut. This (perhaps) goes to explain why No 2 Squadron only suffered an exceptionally low attrition rate over the over-four years they were in South Vietnam.

On Christmas Eve, 1967, Father Pat held a Christmas service with the partitions removed from the three messes and all Unit members except those on duty, attended Father Pat's service. He was an exceedingly popular man, and a true Man of God. During the times we travelled together, Father Pat told me how the long-term Archbishop of Brisbane, Archbishop Duhig, disagreed with him over his dealing with hooligans in his Red Hill, Brisbane, upstairs club. Archbishop Duhig sent Father Pat into the Air Force with the instruction, 'and don't ever come back to this Diocese'. Father Pat then spent the remainder of his priestly life in the RAAF reaching the rank of Group Captain Chaplain, a rarity for Roman Catholic priests.

One day, I was involved with a pressing interpreting situation when Father Pat expected me to travel with him, as usual, through the rice paddies that led into Cong Thanh and Thanh Y. He drove into a fire fight between South Vietnamese Army troops and Viet Cong with their local supporters. Bullets whistled around his jeep, but fortunately, no bullets hit him or his jeep.

Father 'Paddy' McCormick at the Orphanage in Phan Rang, South Vietnam

It is no wonder that for his Vietnam service, Father 'Paddy' was awarded the Member of the British Empire (M.B.E.). I used to jokingly say that I had an M.B.E. but the Padre wears it for me!



On the day that Father Pat was driving alone and became the centre of a fire fight, he came back to my office, he bounded in and said, "Fry, you are to come with me in future on every occasion that I go to the villages. You are my 'good luck charm'!".

Sadly, Father Pat died in Brisbane on the 20th of April 2001.

A Father's congratulatory note to his son.

Father: Son, allow me to offer my warmest congratulations. I'm certain that you'll remember today as the happiest in your life.

Son: Thanks dad – but the wedding is tomorrow.

Father: I know!