

Arthur's Articles.

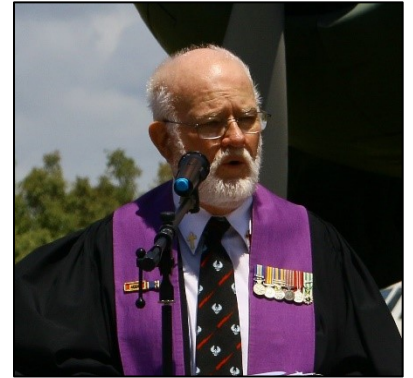
My move from 5 ACS (Det B) to 2 Sqn

5 ACS (Det B) was slowly closing. Some members had moved on to Vung Tau. The remainder of 5ACS had moved from our USAF building into the newly completed 2 Squadron living lines and messes, along with those of us who had been posted into No. 2 Squadron. As all the locally engaged Vietnamese, being tradesmen, had been made redundant and payments made accordingly, my work as an interpreter was hardly needed at Red Horse or at 5 ACS. My days were fully occupied by No. 2 Squadron with the gaggle of new locally engaged Vietnamese both in the Civil Labour Office and on the worksites where regular disputes occurred, sometimes of an ethnic nature, the Vietnamese and the Cham people.

The Vietnamese believed themselves to be superior to the Chams. Even when we adopted a village, we chose to adopt the twin villages of Cong Thanh, a Vietnamese only village, which was adjacent to Thanh Yi, a Cham only village and never the twain shall meet! What we gave the Vietnamese village, we had to give the same to the Cham village.

I have never had a posting where I did not have to change my bed, my office, nor any of the comforts that went with living in 'our own' building. I shared my office with the RAAF Service Police. We travelled together for wherever there was trouble, a Vietnamese interpreter was or should be, on hand. Our office was also responsible for issuing chits which allowed the staff to carry goods off the base, which had been given to them as little extras by generous Australians. Coupled with this, the Police and I supervised the security girl who checked all bags before the staff climbed aboard our trucks to be taken to the USAF border control point at the end of the day.

So, on the 1st of May 1967, my posting to No. 2 Squadron was ushered in in a most seamless fashion. Nothing changed, but I was now totally responsible to No. 2 Squadron and our new Commanding Officer, who also carried over the promise of the 5 ACS (Det B) Commanding Officer, "As you have no military trained Vietnamese interpreter, please use Fry whenever you want a Vietnamese interpreter!" The USAF and US Army Officers Commanding accepted that offer with great glee. I can say that I wore US uniform, as much as I wore my khaki shirt and shorts!





For clarity, I have broken my stay at No.2 Squadron into sub-headings. And may I say, that apart from missing my family, as all members did, the No.2 Squadron posting was among the best, if not the best posting of my entire career.

PMOC (Protestant Men of the Chapel.)

Vung Tau was serviced in Chaplaincy matters by a Protestant Chaplain, while Phan Rang seemed to be reserved for Roman Catholic Chaplains. The first of which was Father Terry Ganzer, who after a few months, was withdrawn from the Air Force, we believed at the request of his Archbishop and returned to his old parish of Toowoomba. He was replaced by Father Paddy McCornack, who was one of the few long-term Roman Catholic chaplains and had such a ministry, that he was respected by everyone, proved by the fact that the entire unit came to his Christmas Eve service. Paddy also was present to bless the crew of every sortie that took off from Phan Rang, so that it can be said that the last person every crew saw before they took off, was God's man in the unit.

*Arthur Fry, Cong Thanh Village Chief,
and Chaplain Terry Ganzer*



The Protestants were serviced to continue in their faith when the Anglican Chaplain, Norm Lawless, came up from Vung Tau. On one occasion, he asked me to help find a suitable site for a Protestant church service. I chose a quiet little hut that housed the K.V.A.s (generators), that I had never heard running during my time in Phan Rang. You guessed it. Mid-way through Norm's service, the KVAs kicked in for the automated monthly service. Afterwards, Norm said to me that I should check when the next scheduled KVA test run would be before I booked another time for him to speak. (The Lord giveth – the Lord taketh away?)

The USAF, or specifically, Red Horse, had built an impressive chapel at Happy Valley, close to the Australian area. Of a Sunday morning and Wednesday night, three of the Australians, Warren Hall, Des Ash and I would walk around to the Chapel and share in the US service. The term 'Protestant Men of the Chapel' soon stuck and our visits were termed 'PMOC.' I will admit that I never made it on every occasion, for often, I would be ready for PMOC, dressed in my civilian clothes, sitting in my living quarters, when guys from an USAF section would pull up outside my room, rush in and throw my GI Green uniform onto my bed and say, "Two minutes, Fry", thus postponing my next visit to PMOC and I would be off to conduct an interpreting session for them. Here I should add that the baggy green safari suited uniforms had no badges of rank, no identifying names, or service. In fact, the one Unit I worked for most often had membership of all three Messes, so as not to identify who the members of the unit were. More on this later.

Years later, we were talking about our visits to PMOC, when one of the PMOC attending RAAF group reminded me that they went more often to PMOC than I did. I could have explained why but left the matter there for that speaker would never know how many times I was dressed and



ready for my walk with them to PMOC when a jeep would pull up and one of the USAF section members who almost treated me exclusively as 'his interpreter', would toss me the uniform that was my size and reserved for me.

Working with United States Units

As I mentioned, there no Vietnamese language trained military personnel sent to Phan Rang from the US Vietnamese Language School on Monterey, California, until November 1967. As you can guess, my services were in high demand. Apart from the Air Police which changed their name to Service Police in November 1967 and with whom both I, as the Interpreter and our two RAAF Service Police, Sergeant Bob and Corporal Brock, did many jobs together with the Air Police, from patrols to investigations within the daily parameters of a military Policeman's duty.

The Air Police had a not-so-well known separate department known as Office of Special Investigation or OSI. You remember Lee Majors playing the role of an OSI agent in the TV series, 'Six Million Dollar Man.' The Phan Rang office only had two investigators, an African American, who I determined was the Officer in Charge and a person who was of Hispanic origin who I determined was an NCO. It was that person who claimed me as his own interpreter. It was a most hilarious situation, for when the OSI section received a tip off, the Hispanic gentleman would race over to the Australian lines, toss me my USAF baggy uniform and boots that zipped up for a quick take off and we would rush to meet the person to be interviewed.



At the same time, the African American OSI member would drive as fast as he could into Thap Cham, the nearest town to the base and collect his Vietnamese national interpreter and race to the rendezvous point. I can remember one time that the two vehicles, blue USAF jeeps with sandbags on the floor in case we hit a mine, racing towards the person waiting to hand over information. We arrived first and the other blue jeep, spun around and drove away like a wounded bull elephant who had just lost a fight with the victor. My fellow put his thumb up to his nose and wiggled his fingers as would a four-year-old who had just triumphed over the other. Six-million-dollar man? They wouldn't have received my money!

The RAAF was just up the hill from the 101 Airborne Brigade, the famous 'Screaming Eagles'. Their Officer Commanding also kept me in mind for special times when he did not want to use their own national Vietnamese interpreter.

One lunch time, members of the 101 Airborne Brigade Military Intelligence Department came to my office and requested I accompany them back to their less than celebrated office. I did and saw a Vietnamese national who I soon discovered was a bus driver. He could not wait to tell me his story, as I interpreted to keep my 101 MID new friends in the conversation.



The story unfolded that the Viet Cong had ambushed a US Army convoy of trucks. They had shot and wounded two US Army drivers who were out of their truck and sitting by the roadside. The VC had told the bus driver to go to Phan Rang Base and advise the officials there that they, the Viet Cong, had their soldiers and two heavily laden US Army trucks.

When he exhausted his story, I asked the 101 investigators if I could play our cards. They agreed so I produced two armalite rifles which from his story, were alongside the soldiers at the ambush site. One of the armalites had dried blood all along the butt.

I had been informed that the Americans had retrieved the troops and their rifles. The injuries the bus driver described on the two soldiers were all on the one soldier. But they were safe. It became apparent that the bus driver did not see the two US soldiers but was only relaying on what the Viet Cong told him. Realising that he had delivered his message and that the US had it well under control, the bus driver made every effort to get out of his predicament and be taken back to the main gate to jump in his bus and get out of there as quickly as possible.

Dog Yarns.

A US airman found a puppy on the roadway. He brought it into the RAAF Police office. We took it upstairs to the Aerodrome Defence Guards, (ADGs) living quarters, offering them to play with the little dog, until the staff went home when I would try to find it a new home. I do not know who had the most enjoyment that day, the dog or the ADGs. That afternoon, at the daily security check by our Security Vietnamese staff. I produced the dog and asked who wanted a puppy? - As a pet! Everyone's hand went up. "Not 'thit cay,' (a local delicacy,) I said.



"Who wants a pet pup?"

I whittled the matter down to 'whose children would like a pet?' and finally, I enquired how many children were in the family. A lucky 'winner' and new owner of the little puppy joined the International-brand truck for the five-mile trip to the USAF check point, clutching her newly acquired family pet.



A Monkey Yarn.

The airmen at Phan Rang had found a monkey. They gathered scrap timber and built a decent cage for their new pet. They then painted in three-foot letters, the first name of the Commanding Officer.



One morning, as I was walking from my office down to the headquarters building on the tarmac area, the Commanding Officer stopped and offered me a ride down to headquarters. As we drew level with the boys' new pet in his freshly built cage, the Commanding Officer said to me, "Look, Arthur, the boys have a pet and it has the first name as me!" I quietly thought, "I am not going to tell him!"



The Vietnamese Staff.

I do not wish to put my Vietnamese friends down, but unlike the tour I spent at Vung Tau, where we never found examples of pilfering, pilfering was rife in Phan Rang. At the security check of an evening, our Vietnamese staff member we paid to do security checks, was not carrying out her duties to our satisfaction. We suspected that she would ignore minor pilfering. The most popular hiding place was in their lunch tins. If the police or I had a 'tip-off,' of stolen items, the first place we would look would be in the 'mucan tin'. If the rice was perfectly flattened and apparently untouched, we would poke a chopstick down into the rice and in almost every case, we would find some item being pilfered, including airmen's watches.

One time, I saw a young male worker approach the front of the checking line and I noticed his head was on an angle. I physically tilted his head and found a packet of cigarettes in the crook of his collarbone! Another time, an oddly sitting hat caught my attention. I lifted the hat and found two packets of cigarettes perched on his head.

One night, Brock, Bob and I were sitting in the open air, watching a movie, while occasionally casting a sideways glance to the yellow Kombi van that was waiting to take the 8 o'clock mess shift home. We saw a young kitchen worker come out of the kitchen, open the back door of the Kombi and place something under the seat. I should mention here that the staff went through the check point, but our RAAF Kombi was never searched.

As soon as she returned to the kitchen, we three went over and checked under the back seat of the Kombi. She had placed several packets of sugar under the seat, which the Police confiscated. As the staff came out to enter the Kombi., we walked over to the Kombi. I spoke to the girl who had put the sugar under the seat, telling her I would see her in my office when she came to work in the morning. "What for?" she asked. I replied in Vietnamese, "You'll find out in about ten minutes time!" I then spoke to the ADG who accompanied the driver on every trip away from the base after 6 p.m. as that was curfew time in Phan Rang.

When the Kombi returned, the ADG, as I had requested, reported to me and I recall him saying, "Geez, I cannot speak Vietnamese but when she put her hand under the back seat after getting out of the vehicle, I knew she was swearing!"

The next morning, she came to my office on arrival. We had a long and helpful discussion for me to better understand the Vietnamese psyche. She had turned on the tears when I called her a



thief. “No,” she said, “I am a pilferer,” - two different words and meanings in Vietnamese. She said if you have ten apples and she has none, then you would not miss two apples, whereas those two apples could mean the only food she had eaten in days!

Her Sergeant steward supervisor pleaded for mercy as otherwise, she was such a good worker. So being the NCO in charge of the Civilian Labour Office and a softie to boot, but having the authority to be judge and jury in all Civil Affairs, I awarded her two weeks suspension, without pay. She thanked the Sergeant steward and me, for our understanding and generosity. When she came back to work after two weeks, she called into my office every morning just to say ‘hello.’ I believe we both learned lessons that day.

A Beetle Nut Episode.

Many of the older Vietnamese, particularly women, had a habit of chewing beetle nut. They would chew it as one chews tobacco. It causes their lips and mouth to turn bright red. When they have received the maximum benefit, they may have achieved through this habit, they would expectorate the red lump from their mouth without caring where it landed. (*I had 8 years in PNG in the 70s – it was rife up there too – tb*)

On employment, all staff were advised that chewing beetle nut was forbidden while at work on the Air Base. One older lady insisted on disobeying this general rule while at work. I spoke to her several times about the habit, but each time she would coyly smile and tell me in Vietnamese, that I was too kind to sack her. Beetle nut has a similar effect to drugs in that during a working day, those who chewed beetle nut all day, could gain a ‘high’ before the working day ended and their speech and behaviour may reflect that ‘high.’



One day, she expectorated a chunk of well-masticated beetle nut close to me. I demanded her security pass. I drew up her pay and collected the money from our accounting section, then drove her to the main gate. Giving her, her final pay, I wished her well for her future. It was only then that she announced to me with a stunned tone, “You really did sack me!”

Miss Van.

The Americans and the RAAF recruited prospective staff at our downtown Phan Rang recruiting Centre. Crowds thronged around the Centre. Some were hopeful of getting a job, some were hopeful of being re-employed, having once worked on the airfield and honourably discharged and many who had worked on the base, offended in one way or another and were hopeful of being re-employed by another unit who were unaware of their supposed misdemeanours.



Such was the case of Van. She had worked in the RAAF Messes but was noticed to be a troublemaker. The Sergeant steward had brought her along to my office and requested termination for that reason. My job was not to counsel the staff with a view of a second chance. Weeks passed, when one day, as I left the downtown Phan Rang office, the usual group of sacked employees was in strong attendance, making vocal threats against the 'unsympathetic' Americans and Australians. Miss Van was in that group as usual.

As I walked out of the Recruiting Centre, having concluded my business for the day, with Bob, the RAAF police officer on one side and a USAF Air Police Sergeant on the other, I felt a strong bash in my back. The object which we saw later, was a house brick, about the size of our Besser block, which then hit the side of our International Scout police jeep.



Miss Van was arrested immediately by the National Police. Her case was heard that day without any foreign witnesses and Van was sentenced to a month in goal. After she was released from goal, I was again leaving the downtown office, when Miss Van approached me holding a parasol. She tilted it towards me, so I could not see her face. "Chao Trung si." (Hello Sergeant,) said Miss Van. I returned the greeting. She started, "Toi rat tiec...." (I am verry sorry.....[for what I did.]) to which I replied in Vietnamese, "Thank you. We often do things that we later regret. But I am pleased to see we can still be friends." To which Miss Van replied. "I am glad that we will always be friends, Now do I get my job back?" In a Vietnamese response that roughly translates, "Not on your Nellie!", Miss Van walked away without raising her parasol and we never met again.

In a footnote and to erase all blame from myself, it was the Sergeant steward who concluded that Miss Van was a troublemaker. He brought her to me to dismiss her. My job was to implement the steward's request, which I valued and trusted his assessment of the staff. He worked with them daily, I did not.

Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People.

The RAAF was involved in a Civil Aid project of 'Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People'. As already told, the RAAF chose to adopt the twin rural villages of Cong Thanh and Thanh Yi. We sent our medical doctors into both villages to cure the sick. I always accompanied our RAAF Medical Doctor. After a few visits, when I interpreted the same phrase time after time, of "Ho, la, Dun," describing a common local complaint which was expecting a form of red linctus, our Medical Officer said to me, "I know, Arthur, I know!" He had heard, 'Ho, la, Dun!' so many times.

Then on one visit, the village chief brought his mother in to see the doctor. As he explained his mother's condition, which I interpreted, as he said, "And she will suddenly fall to the floor and just as I managed to put the sentence into Vietnamese, she collapsed to the floor, as if to prove her son correct.



Every time the doctor and I came into the twin villages, we brought in gifts for the children, in the form of fruit. Oranges sold on the black market for 50 cents each back in 1967, so we never expected to see the children eat the fruit while we were there, but we saw a glut of oranges in the black market after we left. I suggested to the doctor that we should leave the boxes of fruit up around the corner, out of sight, before we came into the villages. That way, the kids who were well could run out for the fruit. Leaving the sick children to see the doctor. "Great idea!" agreed the doctor, so that is what we did.

When we came into the villages, the children scanned the back of our jeep, to discover we had no goodies for them. I said, "O ben kia, co cam." (We have left oranges out there!) Well, the response was, "Ong noi sau" (You tell lies!) I assured them I was not telling lies, but a few children ran out towards the trees where we left the boxes of fruit. They came to the tree and they filled their dresses, their shirts, with oranges and came running back. When the children who had challenged me saw that there were gifts for them, they ran out. They came back, heads hung low, for they had missed out! You may have heard this story before, as I told it in many churches and have even heard others use my true story, but then again, I never put a copyright on any of my yarns!

Father Pat and I used to go into Cong Thanh and Thanh Yi often. One day, I was tied up in another situation, so Father Pat went in by himself. As he crossed through the paddy fields to get to the villages, he was caught in the crossfire between an ARVN unit and the Viet Cong. Bullets whistled around his jeep. When he arrived back at the Unit, he bounded into my office and I will never forget, Father Pat saying to me, "Fry, you are my good luck charm. You must always come with me when we go to the villages in the future." There is a sequel to this story. Following this episode, Father Pat was awarded the Member of the British Empire award. I used to say, "I have an MBE, but the Chaplain wears it!"



Good folk in Australia had collected clothing for this programme. Two treadle sewing machines had been sent to assist the villagers sew clothes. We had enough goods to fill three trailers, so the Commanding Officer arranged a group to go to the twin villages and make an official presentation. Of course, the CO had prepared a speech for this auspicious occasion. Father Terry Ganzer was there to represent the good Christian folk all over Australia who had made these gifts possible. Three ADGs and three drivers were there to prevent another catastrophe. No sooner did the three vehicles appear than the children were on to the trailers and ripped boxes apart. Women jostled for clothing and even ripped what they were wearing to shreds. The Cong Thanh village chief organized for the two treadle sewing machines be taken immediately into his shack. Father Ganzer lost his slouch hat, another driver had his pistol taken, I was photographed lifting children out of the trailer and the entire village was left like a battle ground with our CO standing in a trailer, ready to give his speech.

So much for our attempt of 'Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People.' Cameras caught the action, or 'inaction'! Below is a photo record of the doomed official presentation.



CO waits to deliver his speech.



Arthur Fry surveys the damage.



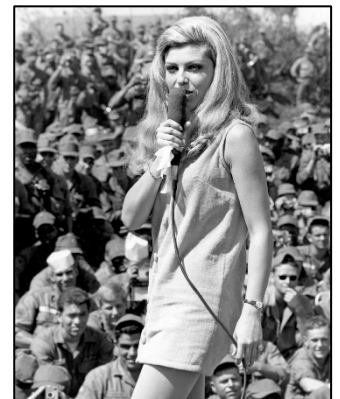
Who borrowed' Fr. Ganzer's slouch hat?



The aftermath – gifted clothing strewn everywhere.

R & R. and R & C.

In September 1967, it was announced that the United States would include Australia in the destinations its troops could travel for Rest and Recuperation (R & R). They extended the offer to Australian troops to join their Pan Am flights to Sydney. Because I had been in Vietnam since Australia Day that year, I was chosen to go out on the first flight. Then I heard that Australia was going to put on a big splash to welcome our American allies to our shores and that I should expect to take part in that huge reception and to understand that I would lose part of my short five days with my family. So, I swapped the first flight with another of the early 5ACS (Det B) members who looked forwards to a big party. He was the person who went up on stage in the Viper Club in Phan Rang and gave his slouch hat to Nancy Sinatra of 'These Boots are Made for Walking' fame" - click the pic above..





I flew out via Camp Alpha in Tan Son Nhat, a US Army staging camp where once you were in, the huge gates slammed closed and there you stayed until your flight was ready for departure. You listened to [AFVN](#) and drank the only beer available which was Lone Star beer and those who attempted to drink it, said that it was akin to kerosene! Now who would have conscientiously drunk kerosene, I ask you?



Pan Am airways doted on its troops all the way to Sydney. They wanted Rest and Recuperation and they received it big time. Arriving in Sydney, I transferred to a Brisbane flight, (at my expense) and very soon, I was with my wife, Annette, my little two-year-old girl, Leanne and for the first time, I met our five-month-old son, Ashley. Sammy drove us back to Ipswich. Annette went to put her arm around my shoulders while in the back seat. Little Leanne unhooked her arms reminding her mother that this is 'my Daddy'!

The five days flew most quickly but getting to know our children was the most important part of those five days. We were soon back at Brisbane airport to fly to Sydney to meet the R & R flight back to Vietnam. Back at Camp Alpha, we never heard any further complaints about Lone Star beer from Texas. I guess hardly any of that kerosene attracted the five-day tourists from America who had Resch's and Toohey's hangovers.

I no sooner arrived back in Phan Rang than the Administrative Officer told me that he noticed I had not taken my R & C, (Rest and Convalescence) leave. I argued that I had just come back from R & R, without avail. "You must take R & C before your tour is up," was the only direction. How could I refuse such a kindly offer, so I enquired as to where R & C would take me and soon I found myself on a C123 Provider flight from Phan Rang to Vung Tau and then an RAAF C130 Hercules from Vung Tau to Butterworth,

There I met up with Al Grimes who had come over with the Canberra's from Malaysia in April and some months later, he had returned to Butterworth. Al showed me around all the sites on Penang Island, while I based myself in the Hostel at Penang. At night, I discovered the best Steak House in Penang, if not the world and ate the juiciest steak I had ever tasted.



My five days R & C passed very quickly and soon I was on the way back to Vung Tau where I sat on the tarmac all day waiting to catch a USAF C123 Provider flight back to Phan Rang.

Winding up RAAF at Phan Rang.

We jump ahead four years, when I was on my second tour in Vietnam and the RAAF had announced its departure from Phan Rang. The string pullers in Canberra thought it may be good to offer those Vietnamese who had served us well for four years in Phan Rang to be offered continued employment in Vung Tau. One question the pundits forgot to ask, was 'Do they have any job vacancies in Vung Tau for all Phan Rang employees?'

So, Assistant Provost Marshal in Vietnam, Neville Clark and I, both being happily married men, knew what to do when we were told, ventured off to Phan Rang and asked every employee if they would like to continue their employment with the RAAF in Vung Tau. Nev and I had a very sleepless night for every employee indicated they would like to come to Vung Tau to continue their employment, don't forget, in jobs that we did not have!

Jackie Sa from my old office, indicated she would like to do just that. I had engaged Jackie during my first tour. As the aircraft was warming up to take us back to Vung Tau with this newly induced problem, one by one, except for Jackie Sa, local staff came to the Civil Labour Office and said, "Perhaps we not come down at this time!" A very thankful Assistant Provost Marshal and me, flew back to Vung Tau and slept all the way.

Within weeks, several ex-Phan Rang employees fronted up at the front gate in Vung Tau, saying they were ready to continue working for the RAAF. I had to break the sad news to them that they had missed the boat and that all those vacancies are now filled. (Now was the time for the children to chorus, "Ong noi sau!")



Farewell No. 2 Squadron RAAF.

Time for me and my first tour in Vietnam was now running down. I received my posting as of the 1st of January 1968. My replacement had just finished his Vietnamese course and had to undergo a few post language study courses. Jackie Sa was deemed proficient enough to stand in for me until Mick Gretton arrived. After all, most people called her the Unit Interpreter, anyway. I was just the nasty old bloke that sacked workers! Not how I had hoped to be remembered!

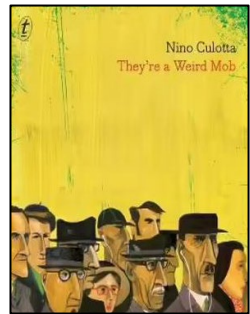


On Christmas Eve, Paddy McCormack held an all-denominational Christmas service when all but those on duty, attended.

'Chalky' White, the WOD, who did the Orderly Sergeant's Roster, said to me, "If you agree to be Orderly Sergeant on Christmas Day, I won't put you on the roster for all of January!" I agreed, then it struck me that I was leaving on the 31st of December.



One last memory of my time at No. 2 Squadron, we enjoyed many entertainers, 'Ding Dong' Denise Drysdale, Patti McGrath, just to name a couple. Towards the end of my tour, we had John O'Grady, better known as Nino Carlotta, who was the author of 'They're a Weird Mob' entertained the troops in a witty, humorous show. In the Sergeant's Mess after the show, the members of the Sergeant's Mess entertained John in their Mess. Gags flew from both Nino and sharp-witted Sergeants' Mess members. John drew from a stack of match folders on the bar and wrote greetings to the members' wives, daughters and / or girlfriends, to the amusement of all.



At the height of this frivolity, I grabbed a match's folder and wrote, 'To Nino Carlotta – from Arthur Fry.' This did not amuse John and he threw the folder of unused matches straight into the wastepaper basket. Which is where I'll leave this story. Join me next edition where you will see me back at the School of Languages, following a new edit by the RAAF, that all Linguists must have two languages! But as I said earlier, being a married man, the answer to whatever Ronnie RAAF demands, is the same as I say to my wife – "Yes, Dear! Whatever you say!"



**Guess who kept everyone
awake last night?**



Impressive people I met in my Air Force Career

This edition, I wish to remember one of my Commanding Officers under whom I worked, during my twenty-six years in the RAAF, Michael McDonald. Michael had lived in Wynnum near Brisbane where my parents lived for a short while in the mid-1950s while our new house was being built at Holland Park in Brisbane. I had not transferred to schools in Wynnum as my sisters did but continued at my High School in Brisbane which was just up the road from our new home, under construction.



I never mixed with the local Wynnum children, as I took the Black and White bus up to Brisbane early in the morning, every weekday and did not return to Wynnum until that evening. Had I transferred schools during that time, I may have met Michael in my teenage years.

I first met Michael when he was posted into Phan Rang as a Canberra pilot in late 1967, around the time then Wing Commander, later Air Marshal Selwyn David Evans took over from Rolf Aronson as Commanding Officer of 2 Squadron, RAAF, in Phan Rang. It would not be for another ten years, that Michael became my second Commanding officer, at No. 1 Flying Training School at Point Cook, when he replaced Roger Lowrey as CO.

At that time, I met Michael and his family every Sunday at the Base Chapel at Point Cook, under the Chaplaincy of first, Clive King and then Roger Boerth, when my wife, Annette, was the chapel organist and I was the Sunday School Superintendent, with our daughter, Leanne, a Sunday School teacher.

After I left 1 FTS in 1978, it would be another nine years before Michael and I met again. I was President of the Ipswich - Amberley Support Group, a group of Senior Air Force officers from the Air Base and city leaders from Ipswich. How I wormed my way from being a retired Air Force officer to become 'one if the city leaders' is yet another story, for another time. When I was at Headquarters, Amberley, I had



heard of the gourmet food club associated with IASG from the XO Amberley and enquired of the nature of this 'club.' I was politely informed that this group was a gathering of Group Captains and above, along with medical doctors in Ipswich, so I would be excluded.

After I took my discharge in February 1986, I was fortunate enough to become the Chief Executive Officer of a large Aged Care complex in the nearby district, which must have catapulted me into this exclusive category of eligibility for membership of IASG. A local medical doctor, Peter Godbolt, had been the inaugural President, when he approached me and asked if I would take



over from him as the IASG's new President. I willingly accepted his offer. An incredibly happy, busy and exciting two years followed.

In my capacity as President of the Ipswich – Amberley Support Group, my role involved a fair amount of liaison with the Bundamba TAFE, where we used their catering school to hold our many functions.

One day, I received an invitation to have lunch with the Director of Bundamba TAFE and a special guest, one of her newly appointed chiefs in TAFE. Little did I know that the special guest was Michael McDonald, nor that he had taken his discharge from the RAAF, nor that his final posting had been as Commanding Officer, Research and Development Unit (ARDU), as a Group Captain.



In the event, Michael greeted me like a long-lost friend and hardly his underling as the Air Force Law and Administration Instructor in his Unit. It was a very pleasant reunion, for we not only had 1 FTS in common, but were also Vietnam Veterans in the highly regarded and dare I say, highly decorated by foreign decorations, No. 2 Squadron unit in Vietnam.

In 2015, I was diagnosed with cancer. After lengthy radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments, I had two major surgeries. While I was in hospital after my second surgery, Annette received a phone call from Michael, asking, "Would Arthur like a visit?" Annette agreed that I would. When I left hospital, Michael and his wife, who lived between their two houses at Hervey Bay and Wynnum, popped in to see me, parking their car outside with their two bicycles strapped to the rear tow bar, indicating they were, like me, fitness fanatics.

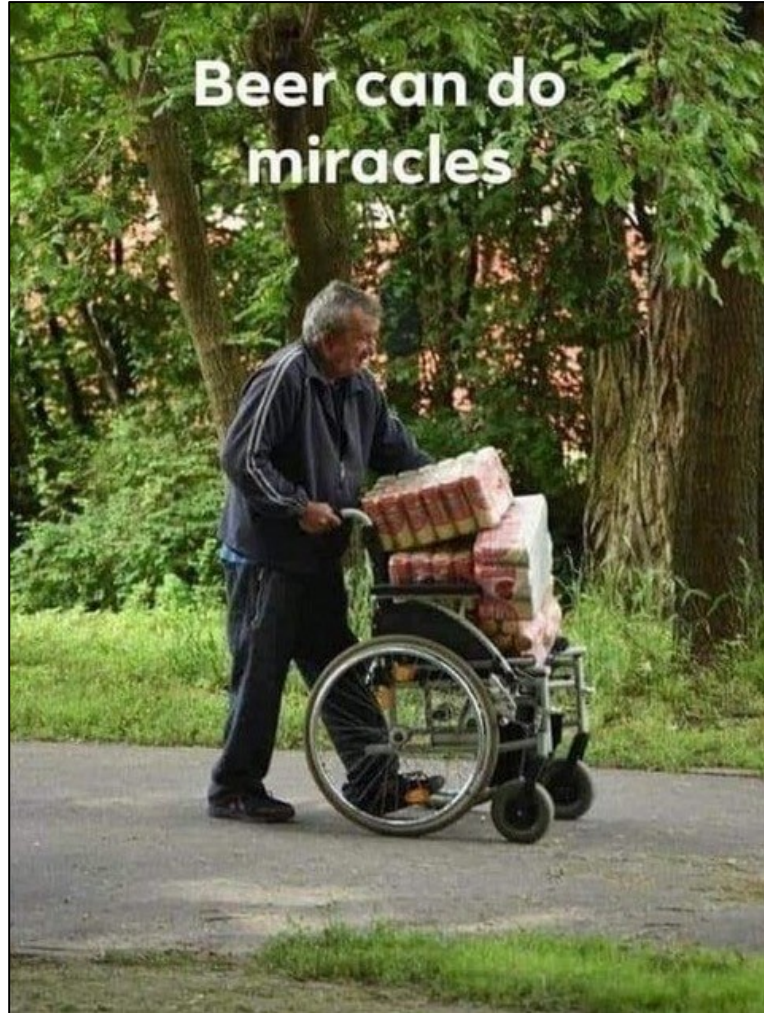
I shall never forget the significance of Michael's visit. It had been thirty-eight years since I was one of Unit's officers, yet he and his wife, wanted to pay me a visit in my time of ill health. How many Commanding Officer's extended that concern to their troops?

Sadly, in 2019, we received word of Michael's death. He had been ill for some six months but did not broadcast his condition. A group of No. 2 Squadron (RAAF) Association members, including our Secretary, Arthur Rennick and Air Commodore John Whitehead, the Patron of No. 2 Squadron (RAAF) Association, Annette and I with other former 2 Squadron members, attended Michael's funeral at Hemmant.

After his service, I spoke with his son, but he did not remember his Sunday School days at RAAF Base, Point Cook, nor his lovely Sunday School teachers.

Farewell, Michael McDonald. You gave great service to your country in peace and war. You had a concern for those who served under you and no doubt above you, that surpassed your duty-of-care to them.

Rest in Peace.





This page left blank.