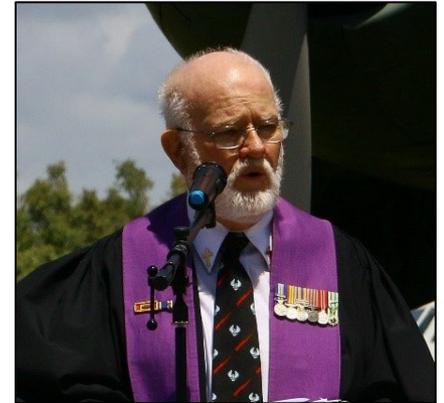


Arthur's Articles.

Five years between Hong Kong postings

In my final months in Hong Kong in 1974, I was busily planning my future, balancing what the Air Force held out to me as a career, compared with what opportunities lie ahead of me outside of the Air Force, teaching Vietnamese or Chinese in Private Schools.



Two of my language colleagues had taken their discharge and began working in a Queensland University under Professor Viviani, one teaching Chinese, as he studied in a Tai Wan University after completing his Chinese class at Point Cook and the other was in Vietnam when I was there on my first tour, as a Warrant Officer Linguist at the Australian Embassy in the 'Khach san Caravelle' in Saigon.

They had engaged me to perform some interesting questionnaires to Vietnamese refugees living in Melbourne in the late 1970's and I had enjoyed interviewing these new settlers in Australia and sending their responses to my former colleagues to help improve the system.

I had two hurdles, one was to obtain a place in the Chinese language training program at Australian National University, the other was to create a job for a Vietnamese Linguist in Canberra, which at that time, none was available. Messages and letters flew between Hong Kong, A.N.U. and the RAAF Headquarters in Canberra. Incredibly, these two difficulties fell into place. I was offered a position in Bachelor of Arts (Asian Studies) at A.N.U. and I was posted to RAAF Support Unit Canberra, to commence after my leave in late January 1975.



Australian National University

After our leave in Ipswich on our return to Australia in November 1974, having taken a holiday rental at Kirra Beach at the Jumbuk flats, where we had our friends from Hong Kong, Ray and Helen Debnam and then Ray and Lyn Williams visit us. Ray and Helen were on their way back to Canberra from Airlie Beach where they purchased two adjoining blocks of land to one day build their retirement home. Flushed with savings that two and a half years in Hong Kong had grown our bank balance, we were driving in a new 1974 Holden HQ sedan, plus we had purchased a quarter of an acre block of land at Raceview in Ipswich, just behind Thorne's Furniture Factory.



As we had a colour TV in Hong Kong, we purchased a colour TV from Tom Edwards in Ipswich, although colour TV was not yet broadcast in Australia. When it did come, we would be ready for it! After all, we had become used to colour TV.

We purchased a metal trailer to cart all our goods we had left at Mum's place in Silkstone, together with our new colour TV which would only be seen in black and white until colour TV was transmitted. We set off for Canberra in late January, stopping overnight at Quirindi with the first-time problem of parking the HQ Holden and box trailer together away from our unit.

The next day, we ventured on to our pre-arranged motel in Canberra, on the northern outskirts of the Nation's Capital. We would stay in that motel until we found a suitable Temporary Rental Allowance (TRA) abode.

On the Monday, I fronted up at the RAAF Support Unit Canberra, where I was told I would be given a married Quarter in Melba. I was also introduced to my new position in the library, where I would sit doing a dog-body job until my Seiko Bell-Matic watch told me it was time to head out to A.N.U. for either a lesson or a tutorial. Because of my twelve months at Point Cook on the Chinese (Mandarin) course and my two years at the Ministry of Defence Chinese Language School in Hong Kong, I had been exempted from Chinese Classical in Year One and elevated to Chinese Classical in Year Two.



I was to replace an Army guy in the library who owned a home in Brain Street, Page. He offered me his home as a Temporary Rental Allowance (T.R.A.) step until I was given a Married Quarter. My weird brain linked all these matters. University, Brain, 'these are signs!' I told myself.

Raef d'Crespiny was the Chinese language teacher and he had a reputation of being the best available in the business. Also on my course was a young would-be diplomat, Kevin Rudd. Years later when I sat on the QCAT Tribunal at Maroochydore Magistrate's Court, my 'legally-trained' President of the Tribunal for five of the eight years I served with Michael Francis, when I told him I was in the same class at A.N.U. as Kevin Rudd, corrected me and said, "No, Kevin Rudd was in your class!"

Everything was going along smoothly. In next to no time, I should have my degree in BA (Asian Studies), then in a short time after that, I would complete my Bachelor Of Education and I would be free as a bird to chase the elusive language teaching position in a Private School and it would be "Goodbye, Air Force, thanks for giving me these two fine Asian languages to support me and my family!"

That would have been fine except for one thing. John Rossiter's kind offer for me to apply for my commission! In late February, I received my movement orders to fly from Canberra to Sydney where I fronted up at 9 a.m. one Monday morning for my interview with a commissioning panel. If I were successful, I would have to quickly review my future. Teaching an Asian language would be good. Becoming an RAAF Officer would also be good. I will just see what develops.

At the 9 a.m. interview with the selection panel. I was asked the usual questions about myself, then the Panel President asked me, "Tell me, Sergeant, do you drink?" Always the smartie, I quickly replied, "Thank you Sir, but can we get this interview over with first?" There was a slight



titter from the panel. When the interview was over, the President spoke to me outside the interview room, "The others went for you. I did not!" he gruffly spat the words out.

That afternoon, I flew back to Canberra and reported to Annette that I had successfully blown that interview. Now to settle back in to A.N.U. and get these studies out of the way, before I applied for a job in a school which taught Asian languages, which more schools were doing.

My Seiko Bell-Matic went off, sending me from my desk in the library to my tutor lesson at A.N.U. On return to Russell Offices, I called in to the Orderly Room to see if my Married Quarter application had progressed any. We were at the point where we were in negotiations with the out-going tenant about purchasing the carpet tiles in the Married Quarter in Melba.

Just then, the Orderly Room Flight Sergeant came bounding through the Orderly Room with his hand extended. "Congratulations, Sir," he exclaimed. I replied, "Hold it right there. You know something that I do not!" He guffawed and asked that I forget what he had just said. I returned to my desk in the library. At 3 p.m. that afternoon, the Flight Sergeant rang me and advised that the Commanding Officer of the RAAF Unit, Canberra, wanted to see me. The C.O. announced that I was no longer a Sergeant, but a Pilot Officer.

I enquired how this promotion would affect my course at A.N.U. but he advised that after my Officer Training School course, I would be posted to the Melbourne area, so an 'A' Grade posting was created so that I could take my family to Melbourne while I was at O.T.S.

I went down to O.T.S. to begin my basic officer's course. On the Good Friday of that year, I flew back to Canberra and loaded all our chattels and our family into our then two cars, having bought a Mini Minor to scoot to and from A.N.U. Annette drove the Holden which pulled the box trailer and I drove the sweet little Mini. We arrived at Deer Park and moved into our pre-booked motel. There we lived out of suitcases until a few weeks later, my name hit the top of the Officers' Married Quarter waiting list and we were offered a brick Married Quarter in Werribee, still without a posting.



5 Richmond Crescent, Werribee, with the Fry's vehicles



Our furniture was stored in Melbourne prior to going to Hong Kong, so, very soon, our furniture and our goods and chattels we had carried from Hong Kong to Ipswich, to Canberra to Deer Park were soon all together again in Richmond Crescent, Werribee, where they would remain for five years.

My O.T.S. course was interesting, punctuated with periods on the drill square. I was introduced to sword drill by the WOD, the late Wally Fawkner. The C.O. of O.T.S. called me up one day and said he had a special task for me. He said he knew I would pass the course, but I would not be Dux, as my sword drill was not as good as the officer chosen to be Dux. He was also withdrawing me from the course to investigate injuries caused to two young Pilot Officer Air Traffic Control trainees who were injured when a car came onto the Laverton-Point Cook road one night, from their right and hit them, causing their car to roll and two passengers in the car were thrown through the rear window and suffered severe injuries.

There were other complexities that were mentioned, the two young officers were in company of two airwomen. He stressed that I was not to investigate the cause of the crash, or make comment on the fraternising issue, but was to strictly examine how the injuries occurred. That was a terrific opportunity for me to sort out, as I have done ever since, to stick to the terms of reference and report only on those things. In the event, I discovered that had the rear seat Pilot Officer did not have his legs clutching a carton of beer, when he was ejected from the vehicle through the rear window, his both legs would not have been broken.

The job done, I returned to the course, I was not the Dux, who carried the sword on our graduation parade, but I came away from my C.O.'s task a much wiser lad and have always learned to read my 'terms of reference' before and during any task I was given.



Arthur receives his graduation certificate from Officer Training School at Point Cook in June 1975

After graduation, I was posted to Base Squadron, Point Cook, as Admin 1 with several secondary appointments, chief of which was that of OiC Base Police, where I spent most of my time. I was also Welfare Officer, OiC Gymnasium, where my SNCOiC was Foster Bibron. I used to follow Foster in the ring before he joined the RAAF as a Physical Training Instructor and soon rose to the rank of Sergeant. He was a perfect gentleman and how he ever suffered the beltings he received in the ring towards the end of his pugilistic career, I never knew.

I was also OiC Electronic Data Processing which was in a small office in the Base Store on the other side of the tarmac, opposite the School of Languages and which I always thought should be part of the Store. While this task took my interest, it was well above my knowledge of



computers at the time, but it took a bicycle ride across 'the strip' so I did enjoy the exercise I received as I spent time at the E.D.P. section. Last of all, I was OIC of the Maritime Section. This section saw an aging crash boat berthed at the Point Cook pier 'just in case' any Flying Training School student pilot mistook the water of Port Philip Bay for the runway! Warrant Officer Constable had managed that section very well for many years.



I had a few highlights at Base Squadron. One which sweeps my memory was that after the Remembrance Day 1975

dismissal of the Prime Minister by the Governor General, the Governor-General made his first public appearance at the Graduation of the Academy Course at Point Cook. As OIC Base Police, I was responsible for his safety while on the base. I had to co-ordinate RAAF Police, Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police to guarantee his safety for rightly or wrongly, his actions had caused a great division in the Australian community.

Base squadron's Commanding Officer was Wing Commander Alan Bishop, a Hercules pilot and previous Chinese course graduate and Commanding Officer of the Hong Kong detachment of Base Squadron Butterworth. The G-G had commenced his inspection of the graduating class from Alan's office. I watched him walk out to the parade ground from my office, next door to the C.O. I can still see him bobbing along with his top hat managing the bobbing and his hands both pointing downwards and not moving, with his coat tails finishing off the 'vice-regal' identity.

After his inspection of the graduating class, he addressed the graduates which I could not hear, then he returned to the C.O.'s office and thence departed. As his entourage passed through the front gate, a Corporal policeman phoned me to advise his departure. As I stood up, my knees turned to jelly as if I could not stand. I mused, "Thank goodness that no one tried to take out the G-G out on my watch!"

Boxing Day 1975 was a turning point in my life. I was called to the back of the Officer's Mess, as I had been Orderly Officer that day. I was told that members of one of my sections had been stealing equipment and other property from several places on the base. My informant even suggested other spots where the miscreants had boasted they would strike next. Knowing Provost Unit was on stand down which was where I would normally pass this information, I reported to my C.O. who decided that our Base Squadron officers, not on leave, must protect the stated targets until Provost Unit re-opened after Christmas.

Trusted members placed me and one other officer each night in those places overnight in the hopes of capturing the miscreants red handed, until Provost Unit returned. No one was captured,



but my superiors in Provost Unit were most displeased that we had not called on them earlier. They took over the case and truck loads of goods were brought back to the base. This resulted in three RAAF members facing a Court Martial in early March.

Each arrested member was suitably punished. I sat on every Court Martial including these three. In all, the three courts martial went from one day until the next, at 3 p.m. except for an hour's break at 5 a.m. on the second day, when the panel members were changed.

During that time, the film, "Mrs Fraser's Island" was being filmed off the pier at Point Cook. The film's directors gave Alan Bishop several passes to see the film. He gave me two of those passes for all the demanding work and sleepless nights I had endured in bringing these three cases to fruition.

As I climbed the stairs at the theatre, those many months caught up with me and I took a bad turn. I spent several months in hospital, 6 RAAF at Laverton and Heidelberg, then back to 6 RAAF, to recuperate. At the end of my recuperation period, firstly, my job was split up and shared by three officers and I was posted to No. 1 Flying Training School as the Air Force Law lecturer, where I spent three years, but was still called on every time there was a Court Martial at Point Cook.

Most times I was the Officer Assisting the Prosecuting Officer, other times, I was the Officer assisting the Defending Officer. A lawyer, Chris Tankey, never worked with me, but was always on the 'other side.' When I left the Air Force, he told me his brother, Jim, sadly now deceased, was a Medical Doctor in the town I retired to. Jim was my GP for many years and like his brother, a thorough gentleman.

I spent three very pleasant years at 1 FTS, I served under two Wing Commander Commanding Officers, Lowrey and Mike McDonald. I had a great rapport with the student pilots, yet I never saw many of them in life after 1 FTS. One who failed Pilots Course, went on to be an Air Commodore Education Officer. Another who did not make the grade as a pilot, retired as a Group Captain, IntelO.



The Cadets had their own mess at Point Cook, as well as their own Dining-In nights. At one Dining-In night, I sat near an RAAF cadet who hailed from Rhodesia. I suggested to him that if Harold Hawkins, who was born in Toowoomba, could rise to the head of the Rhodesian Air Force, then he, who was born in Rhodesia, could surely rise to the head of the Australian Air Force. Encouraged by several more drinks throughout the night, this young man rose to his feet, was goaded to climb on to the table and boldly told his classmates that he was going to be the head of the RAAF. And no, he never did!

I had another cadet at Point Cook who gained my appreciation but not a great pass mark for my topics, for while I was lecturing, he drew a caricature of me, flying a CT4 (plastic parrot), while waving an Air Force Law Manual (MAFL) out of the cockpit. I never heard of him again, but Cadet Collins has gone down in history as being a very capable caricature artist.

From 1 FTS, I was posted back into Support Command, where I became RAAFLO (RAAF Liaison Officer) to Department of Defence (Melbourne). I had a small unit of up to thirty airmen who had various jobs in Defence. To maintain our RAAF identity, we socialised on every available occasion. One night just before Christmas in 1978, we celebrated Christmas at a theatre



restaurant in Hawthorn. Several other groups were there. The compere enquired if each table group were celebrating a Christmas party. Most were. When the compere announced the RAAF table, he asked if we were celebrating a Christmas party. In hindsight, I should have said, "Yes." But my staff goaded me into giving a ridiculous reply. I foolishly stood up and spoke. "No. We have had our avgas reduced so much, that we can only fly one day a year. We are celebrating tonight because tomorrow is that day!" The next day, I really regretted what I said, for the news brought the story of a night-time helicopter crash which took the life of that unit's C.O. and his co-pilot, one of my finest students during my time at 1 FTS.

Created by Cadet Collins while listening to Arthur's lectures!

While I was at Defence Melbourne, I first met Steve Larkin, then a Flying Officer. Steve, with whom we have been friends ever since and I served a few more tours with him and his wife, Siepie. They married in Werribee while we were at Defence Melbourne and I had the honour of driving them in the wedding car.



Siepie arrives at her wedding to Steve Larkin



Steve and Siepie. Later in his RAAF career, Steve became the Commanding Officer, Australian Joint Forces Unit, Hong Kong.

While at Defence Melbourne, I had a visitor from Canberra who sounded me out about going to Kuala Lumpur where my family would be housed in KL, our children schooled in KL, while I would fly out to Pulau Tengah on a Monday morning and return on Friday afternoon and join the



Australian Army detachment of Vietnamese Linguists helping DFAT sort out the hopeful Vietnamese refugees desiring to settle in Australia. I agreed and the paperwork for my inventory to KL started.

A few months later, with the uplift day for KL imminent, I had another visitor from Canberra and this guy said, "There is a vacancy coming up in Hong Kong for a bloke with your skills. We know you are ear-marked for Pulau Tengah, but how would you feel about another run at Hong Kong?" I replied, "Forget KL." There and then, my life took another incredible turn – for the better.

While living in Werribee, the Chaplain at Point Cook had been Rodger Boerth who I had served with in Vung Tau in 1971. We would visit the high-rise flats in Richmond, assisting the Vietnamese refugees and distributing furniture through the great works of the congregation of the Hyde Street, Footscray Uniting Church to gift furniture to the new arrivals.

Rodger Boerth, always the comedian, used to say that we travel together because he cannot speak Vietnamese or Chinese, but Arthur can. Rodger did all the thinking and talking because Arthur cannot think!" Years later, I met a Vietnamese comedian on a cruise ship who said his grandmother brought him up in the Elizabeth Street, Richmond, flats and his grandmother told him about the two RAAF Chaplains, (Rodger was, I was not) who used to visit to look after the refugees. That was Hung Le, but he announced himself as "Hung lo."

Another odd memory comes to light, thinking about the Richmond flats. Rodger and I attended a family one night, which we thought was a husband, wife and four beautiful children. She asked if she could speak to me personally. She then told me that she wanted me to tell the man we thought was her husband to take off and take the kids with him. She admitted that in Pulau Tengah, the two had met and decided to tell DFAT that they were husband and wife, then selected four children that looked like them and the six of them tricked the Australians into coming to Australia. Now her real husband has been released from an 'Education centre' and she wants to bring him to Australia, so False Husband Number 2 must go, along with their so-called children. Rodger and I pondered the problem for a second and produced the decision, "you tell him to take off. You place the children. You tell the government you want your first husband to emigrate here."



The inventory was in. We just had to change the destination. Soon we were closing our life off in Werribee, as we had in 1972, preparing for another adventure in Hong Kong. Not another word was mentioned about KL. That will remain a mystery. But who was to guarantee a flight out of Pulau Tengah to Kuala Lumpur every Friday night? Or what had KL social life in comparison to that which we had enjoyed in Hong Kong? Hong Kong, here we come again, the family all five years older!

Impressive Items from my Air Force Career.

During my second tour of Hong Kong, I had the privilege to be the President of the Officers' Mess Committee (PMC) for the combined Army, Navy and Air Force Mess. Being a small group, we



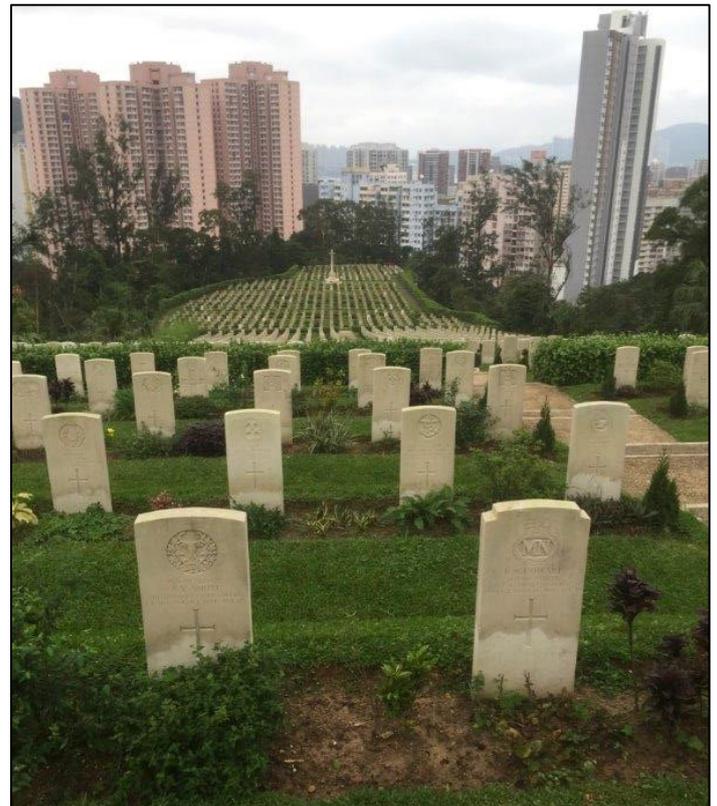
did not own our own building, so we hired the Hong Kong military mess known as 'The Ninety and Nine.' At every mess dining-in night, after toasting Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, we would offer a toast to 'The Ninety and Nine.' On reflection, I thought it time to tell the brave story of 'The Ninety and Nine' through the pages of the RAM.

It was Christmas Day 1941. The Japanese Imperial Army crossed from the mainland of Hong Kong to Hong Kong Island, landing at Lye Yue Mun, a British military post where readers of this column would remember that in 1972, I attended the British Ministry of Defence Chinese language School. Thirty-one years after that dreadful battle of Hong Kong, (see [HERE](#)) I had a connection with that infamous place. The battle was fierce and unforgiving, however, ninety-nine British soldiers crawled out of Lye Yue Mun undeterred, with the aim of crawling and moving undetected to Stanley Fort, a larger British military post at Stanley on the southern side of Hong Kong Island to warn that establishment that the Japanese Imperial Army had attacked and overran the Barracks at Lye Yue Mun and to prepare for their ultimate arrival at Stanley some ten miles from Lye Yue Mun.

The bravery of their walk / crawl from Lye Yue Mun to Stanley is still remembered up until at least the 30th of June 1997, in the Hong Kong Volunteers Officers' Mess, not only by the naming of the Mess, but in this simple practice of toasting the Ninety and Nine after toasting the monarch of the British Colony.

The Chai Wan War Cemetery on Eastern Hong Kong Island today, where many British and Australian troops are buried, following the Japanese attack on 25th of December 1941

As a small unit, we usually had mixed Officers / Sergeants mixed dining-in nights, when the PMC and CMC (Chairman of the Sergeants mess committee.) and their ladies, greeted all attendees. In this environment, many guests who were not in the Australian military were initiated into the subtleties of the military dining-in night.



When the head table which included the PMC, the CMC and their ladies accompanied the official guests out of the dining-room, the Mister Vice; would take the chair and govern over a riotous evening of frivolity and hilarity, from dreamed up 'roasts' to utter nonsense with liberal 'fines', mainly of bottles of alcohol for those who were ridiculed and held in contempt of this 'kangaroo court'.

As I sipped my coffee with the invited guests, I remember feigning to be back in the dining room where I usually sat when not as the PMC and enjoying that I was then missing out on of jocular banter, but curious as to the cause of the hilarity I was listening to from outside the dining room.



Here is to the Ninety-and-Nine. Long may their heroic deeds of that Christmas Day eighty-one years ago, be remembered forever!

**Paddy goes on a
First Aid course, the
instructor asks,
"What would you do
if your child
swallowed the front
door key?" Paddy
said, "Climb through
the window!!!"**