

## Mango Stories

### John (The Beast) Best—A14431—Armament Fitter

#### Mango musing

Fifty years eh; who'd have thought it, when we joined up, way back then?  
That some of us would turn up here, and join up, once again.  
There's some of us are strangers, still, and some have ties that bind,  
There's some have done quite well since then, and others dropped behind,  
No matter where we came from, or achieved; we can't ignore,  
We are bonded; we are brothers, from the Course of Fifty-Four.

History shows we weren't exactly, what they had hoped to net,  
But I put it to you, Mangoes, how much better could they get?  
If they'd searched the whole world over, than you blokes, yes you, this mob,  
And those of you, who flew those planes, knew we could do the job.  
We were keen, we were committed, we met each trade's compliance,  
And face it, if not Armament, it's hardly rocket science.

Looking back I can't help smiling, when I think about the staff,  
Those who had to groom and train us, I just bet they had a laugh,  
As our motley crew descended, on their Wagga Wagga Base,  
Most bewildered and bedraggled, some with coal dust on their face.  
While some came from stable backgrounds, others had no family tree,  
But they instilled a sense of family in the likes of you and me.

Some half formed, no more than school kids and still damp behind the ears,  
Others men then, with men's bodies, yet possessed of teenage fears,  
"Could we hack it, would we make it?" thoughts we never spoke out loud,  
Some emerged as natural leaders, others settled in the crowd,  
They cajoled us and they bullied, welded us into a team,  
And the greatest gift they gave us, I believe was self-esteem.

Self belief's a potent weapon, the most powerful I know,  
And while some are born believers, others take their time to grow,  
As I look around this room, I see you men, I knew as kids,  
And I wonder why, more of us didn't wind up on the skids,  
Why more aren't drunken derelicts, who sleep by river's banks,  
I reckon the Apprentice Scheme deserves a vote of thanks,

For it gave our lives direction, at a crucial time in life,  
When one path could lead you upwards, and another into strife.  
I used to scoff at comradeship, esprit de corps I'd doubt,  
That's until I left the Service, and had to go without.  
But even then, through Rod's good works, old Macca sitting there,  
I'd check his list, and ring a mate, and find someone who'd care.

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So Rod stand up and take a bow, and you blokes who bunged this on,  
And let's spare a thought for our good mates, who from this earth are gone,  
Others found this thing, called mateship, in a surf club, football team,  
In a street gang, on a trawler, we the RAAF Apprentice Scheme,  
So no matter where you came from, or achieved, you can't ignore,  
We are brothers, we are bonded, we're the Course of Fifty-Four.

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