

Ray Blissett—A14418—Clerk Equipment

After completing our initial training at RSTT Wagga Wagga the clerk equipment JEAT's arrived at 3AD Amberley, Queensland in January 1955.

We mostly worked in stock control and rotated through the warehouse and various technical sections. During this period I was able to go home to Murwillumbah each weekend usually accompanied by Ian McDonald. "Mac" was a keen rifle shooter and we spent many days in the scrub around home shooting flying foxes and slapping mosquitoes (I guess we would be locked up for doing that now).

The course should have graduated in July 1955 but we were not trade tested until August. Group Captain Kev Rogers (then a flight lieutenant) admitted to me many years later that he wanted to keep us as long as possible as we represented a very high percentage of his workforce. Fortunately for us the chief equipment officer returned from leave and we graduated and were posted out of 3AD.

I received a northern posting (one mile up the road to barracks section, Base Squadron) In early 1956 I returned to 3AD for four months before being posted to No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron in Darwin.

My duties at 5ACS were those of supervisor of the independent stocktaking staff. The team consisted of myself and two leading aircraftsmen and we were part of the senior accountant officer's staff.

Our living quarters had previously been occupied by the base Aboriginal work force. They were forty by twenty huts consisting of a concrete slab floor, corrugated iron roof and flywire walls. After being there about six months I got to share half a locker; until then we lived out of our cabin trunk. The living area was located about one mile away from the mess and other sections of Base Squadron.

5ACS and Base Squadron were two opposing camps, we even had separate areas in the Airmen's Mess. Darwinites would ask, "Do you belong to the RAAF or ACS?" I played cricket for ACS and our hardest matches were always against Base Squadron. We worked six days a week and when the cement boats came in we did our normal day shift and then another four to five hours unloading cement trucks at the cement dumps at the strip working area. Eventually the works officers realised that "the wet" would arrive before all the cement was used, so we then reloaded it onto the trucks and moved it into a hangar.

At the end of 1957 I returned by road to Amberley and went on three months leave. In early 1958 I was posted to 5ACS Detachment A at Williamtown. I worked there until I was promoted to corporal in May and was then transferred to the hangar party at Richmond. A wartime hangar at Rathmines was dismantled and loaded onto naval barges, towed down the coast to the Hawkesbury River, then up the river to Windsor where it was unloaded at the Windsor bridge and trucked to RAAF Richmond. The unloading and transfer was carried out at night. When it was reconstructed at Richmond it was used as the C130 maintenance hangar.

In February 1959, I married Catherine Anne Dooley, the young lady Johnny Ridout introduced to me in 1954. We were married at St Brigid's Catholic Church, Marrickville on 7 February.

I was posted out of 5ACS to 75 Squadron at RAAF Williamtown. Here I worked as an equipment liaison corporal. From 75 Squadron I was posted to 3 RAAF Hospital for duties in the hospital dispensary.

Our first child Therese Anne was born in December 1959. In May 1961 Matthew Raymond was born and a month later I was promoted to the rank of sergeant and posted back to 3AD. We initially lived at Inala but after twelve months moved on to the base married quarters at Amberley. In 1964 Matthew lost the sight of his right eye in an accident. He was playing with another boy and was accidentally hit in the eye with a toy gun.

Mango Stories

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Late in 1965 I was placed on a warning order for detachment to Lockheed California with the P3B Orion procurement team. In November I was promoted to flight sergeant. Stephen Clifton our third child was born on Christmas day 1965, some two months premature.

I departed for the United States in May 1966, leaving behind a wife, a daughter on crutches, a son with his arm in a sling and a six-month-old baby (not the greatest thing to do to your wife). The detachment lasted four and a half months. Whilst we were there we visited Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and Disney Land.

In March 1967 I was commissioned into the equipment branch and was posted to HQOC Unit as the barracks, housing and catering officer after completing the officer initial training course at Point Cook and an equipment officer course at Tottenham. After twelve months as catering officer I was sent to a catering course in Melbourne. As always happens, when I returned the duties of catering officer were handed over to the senior equipment officer who was not catering trained. Whilst I was at Point Cook I was lucky enough to have a mate on the same course: Mango, Bill Heins. We had not seen each other since Wagga in 1954, nice to see a friendly face.

From HQOC we went to Base Squadron, Williamtown in 1970. Whilst there I filled the positions of assistant catering officer and warehousing officer. September 1971 saw us in Malaysia. This was a real adventure for the children as they were old enough to appreciate living in a foreign country. We initially lived in Robina Park Estate right next to the prawn factory. However we were lucky enough to get married quarters on Penang Island. This meant I had to travel by bus and ferry to get to work. However, this was better than the children catching the school bus at six-thirty am and not being home until about four pm. My appointment was again as assistant catering officer. Errol Alcock was the senior stores officer.

Catherine got back into the golf habit and was on the committee of the Penang Ladies Golf Club. She was fortunate enough to meet the king of Malaysia at a golf presentation in Kedah. I was treasurer and state selector for the Penang State Cricket Association. Therese and Matthew were members of the Australian girl guides and boy scout groups and went on several tours around Malaysia and Thailand. Stephen was a member of the Joey's boxing team. We were fortunate to be in Malaysia when Australians were still welcome.

Just before Christmas 1973 we returned to Australia and I was posted to Base Squadron Laverton. My posting was as senior stores officer. So after five years in the catering area I was finally back in the mainstream equipment activity. In August 1975 I was posted to HQSC as acting squadron leader for duty at Essendon as the equipment liaison officer. During my period as ELO one of the resident engineering officers was Squadron Leader Jack Kelley. No doubt many instrument fitter apprentices will remember Sergeant J. Kelley from the instrument section at Wagga.

December 1979 saw us back at HQOC at Glenbrook. I was appointed as Plans 4, responsible for the planning of the movements and logistics aspects of exercises and operations of the RAAF. I spent many days living in tents alongside airfields and was the senior equipment officer for exercise Kangaroo 3 at Rockhampton. During the three months while I was at Rockhampton in 1979 Catherine was planning Therese's wedding to be held in December (once again on her own).

After I retired in January 1980 we moved back to the Tweed and built the house we still live in at Uki. From 1982 until I finally retired in 1998 I worked as a courier driver and later on as an owner driver for a courier company carrying out business between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast.

Catherine and I now have eight grand children ranging in age from six to twenty-one. Therese has two boys and a girl, Matthew has two girls and Stephen has two boys and a girl.

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Therese's husband John (ex-radio apprentice/flight lieutenant engineering officer) is now an Assembly of God pastor with his own church in Ipswich. Matthew and his family live at Banora Point and he is the servicing schedule manager at the Nissan/Mazda dealership at Tweed Heads. Stephen and his family live at Pacific Pines on the Gold Coast where he works as a spare parts interpreter for the Mack truck dealership at Labrador.

Catherine continues with her golf twice a week and has been on various golf club committees for some fourteen years. She is also very keen on making porcelain dolls and other ceramic articles.

I have been either secretary, treasurer or secretary/treasurer of the Uki RSL sub-branch since 1983, also the treasurer of the Murwillumbah Veterans Golfers Club for the past four years.

Catherine and I try to keep up to date with the ex-service community by attending as many reunions as possible. We normally attend the 5ACS reunion in Brisbane, national JEAT reunions when held in northern NSW or southern Queensland and combined Apprentice and JEAT reunions. I attend the "Blackhanders" reunion at the Sergeants Mess at Amberley every year.

We are looking forward to the upcoming reunion at Coffs Harbour and hope to meet up with many friends whom we haven't seen for decades.

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The Blissett clan
including eight
grandchildren.



Back: L to R : John Anderson, me, Catherine, Joanne (Matthew's wife)
Front: Karen (Stephen's wife), Stephen, Therese, Matthew.