

Mike Cuthbert—A53153—Electrical Fitter

Life after Wagga

After graduation trip home

What day was graduation? - Friday 7 December? It doesn't matter anyway because most people were off home at that point except for the Sandgropers who, because the Olympic Games ended on Saturday 8th, were ticketed out from Melbourne for the two and a half-day rail journey to Perth on Wednesday 12th. Blue Berry (Brian) and I felt that waiting around was not for us so we changed our rail ticket to Melbourne to get us down there on Saturday 8th.

By hell or high water we weren't going to wait around till the 12th

A platform ticket and the aid of some Boy Scouts to carry our luggage through, enabled us to become firmly established in seats on the Overland to Adelaide. There was some upset when the conductor found his records incorrect but this was soon righted when he received ten shillings from each of us. So good was his reward that Blue and I had an eight seater compartment to ourselves and the conductor stood in front of our door when more passengers boarded during the night and directed them, to their discontent, to fill up all seats further down the carriage.

Adelaide - so far so good

For the afternoon train to Port Pirie, platform tickets did the job again and I passed the luggage over the fence a little way down the platform out of sight of the ticket collectors. A repeat on this train: the ten shillings once again did the job, but we were assured there would be no vacancies on the Transcontinental to Kalgoorlie.

Port Pirie - so far so good

The Transcontinental left from the same platform so we had no trouble boarding here. A repetition of previous once again but we were instructed that we'd have to get off at Port Augusta. A pound each this time bought the conductor and he then thought that maybe a family boarding at Port Augusta might not be there. If they were, then things would be a bit tight but there may be a cabin available in first-class. The family didn't get on so we were then set for the remainder of the trip, as seats on the Kalgoorlie - Perth train were guaranteed. We arrived in Perth on Tuesday 11th.

Two pounds each. Could we have got across for four pounds if we'd had no tickets at all?

Laverton

A magnificent Christmas holiday, then back to the exciting life (and big pay) at the bleak No 1AD. A varied year as I guess most ex-Appies experienced. Component servicing, aircraft servicing, modifications and assembly work on Dakotas, Meteors, Canberras and Sabres. A test flight visit to Tocumwal and a good look over remnants of older aircraft that had been well pirated and in many cases reduced to scrap.

The dreaded guard duty exists - two on and four off.

Still at Laverton for the next two and a half years at 21 Squadron, Citizens Air Force. Working every second weekend and every Monday off. Goodbye to the Wirraways after an exciting passenger flight then goodbye to single Vampires. Servicing and extensive modifications to twin Vampires plus a joyride. Guard duties gone to be replaced by duty electrician and duty crew annoyances. Six months basic electronics course at Ballarat during the snowy winter of 1959 followed by four weeks hanging onto a monstrous jack hammer setting up aircraft arrestor barriers at Laverton, Sale and Pearce.

East Sale

From the frying pan into the fire (or should we say icebox) - off to East Sale. The Lincolns had not long gone but Sylvester the mascot cat still remained (albeit with most of his teeth having been extracted). Work as usual on Winjeels, Dakotas, Vampires and twin Canberras. In 1961 I married Bev in New Zealand and a year later went on a nav-ex trip to New Zealand

Mango Stories

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via Amberley and Norfolk Island (not popular with Bev).

Richmond

A move to Richmond followed and the desperate search for somewhere to live in an area where accommodation was at a premium. A car of questionable performance absolutely refused to get further than halfway up to Kurrajong Heights so this further restricted the accommodation opportunities. The work on Hercules was very challenging especially the engine fuel systems. In the days of long waits, a promotion to corporal.

East Sale

I must have done something wrong as, in a short two years, back to Sale. Work as before with a couple of variations. TWI Course which seemed like a waste of time (and difficult to keep awake in) as work procedures in the service restricted how much a person could implement. This course proved to be invaluable in a civvy job after discharge. Twelve months as NCO i/c trade test board under the dreaded Wing Commander Rex Cormie (actually, I found him good to work under). In March 1966, promotion to sergeant and the dilemma: to accept the promotion or the posting to Butterworth. Got both!

Butterworth

An exciting move on the then fairly modern 707 via Townsville and Manila to ready accommodation on Penang Island. An amah to look after the house and our three children while we spent Saturdays in town duty free shopping and evenings out somewhere socialising. Sabre maintenance for this final term in the service. Riots during this period caused some uneasiness and of course the two, two-month stints at Ubon did little to impress anyone.

After fifteen years, discharge at Pearce then direct to New Zealand to set up the “after life”.

First civvy job

Work at Ralta Ltd as a production supervisor in the appliance production sectors, mainly electric fry pans starting in Wellington and later moving to Palmerston North. This work then extended to manufacturing electric blanket heating cable for local use and export to Australia. A further extension led to courses on plastics then control of the injection moulding section operating around the clock for the five-day week. The complete factory burnt to the ground after eighteen months, but we progressively replaced or repaired machinery in temporary premises to maintain continuity of production.

Our fourth child arrived in 1971: the first Kiwi. Transferred to overall factory manager, controlling up to four hundred staff in the peak of season for one and a half shifts daily, mostly women. The company, which was very close-knit, was sold to Sunbeam Corp. and the changeover was not without dissent. After having been employed there for twelve years, time for change arose.

Second civvy job

A position became available as general manager with a future opportunity to purchase shares and fulfill the position of managing director was accepted at Industrial Innovations Ltd (name later changed to Reese Engineering Ltd).

The company manufactured agricultural machinery, primarily tractor-drawn hay mowers for New Zealand and a fledgling export market to Australia. Exports to Australia were consolidated through an importer but eventually we leased a warehouse in Geelong, set up direct franchise arrangements with farm machinery retailers along coastal regions between Sydney and Adelaide then back along the Murray River irrigation areas. West Australia was serviced from a machinery retailer in Bunbury. Setting up distribution took considerable travel and, once established, field days support for the machinery retailers added to my time in Australia.

To achieve all year round sales and production we drew upon assistance of overseas trade commissioners, market surveys and attended trade shows in various countries to eventually

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establish that the United States was the prime starting point in our push into the northern hemisphere.

After jailing a crooked accountant we tackled the northern hemisphere market and sent machines to Portland (Oregon) and Baltimore (Maryland). From this we learned of the better opportunities of operating in the Midwest and leased a warehouse in Louisville (Kentucky). Two people were employed and assisted us in setting up a line of retail farm machinery dealers over the vast area we intended to cover. The majority of sales activities commenced in the southern states of Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia then progressed northward up through New England, Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. The market is huge and the NZ factory was fully extended producing, crating and loading an additional five hundred machines above normal manufacture of seven hundred to satisfy these demands.

As a result of machinery show exhibiting, and the word getting about, further exports to the UK, Panama, Brazil, Uruguay and South Africa eventuated. Supply was from either the USA warehouse or direct from New Zealand. As these were through importing companies, service beyond initial setting up on site in these regions was considerably less.

The word “we” arises in this history and this refers to the other shareholder (major) and myself. Until four years prior to selling the business in July 2000 the setting up, marketing and sales activities were handled by “we” until a full time marketing/sales manager was employed. Manufacturing, the search for new products to manufacture or market fell totally into my lap and involved visits to agricultural shows in the USA, Italy, Germany and the UK. My wife accompanied me on extended visits to the UK and USA where we enjoyed several tours: the thing that tourists do.

Third civvy job - retirement

After the sale of the business we sold our house and moved to Katikati (Bay of Plenty, New Zealand), built a new house and settled to a life of retirement with plenty of fishing.

Since January 1954, I've crossed the Nullabor Plain by car twice and train ten or eleven times and at this reunion hope to add another rail crossing to the list. Relatives live in WA and my wife and I aim to continue going there every second or third year while we are both able but generally by the most economical way - flying. Whilst the women like to do the shops over, etc, my brother and I generally migrate northward from Perth to Geraldton (Abrolhos Islands), Exmouth Gulf or Broome for a week or so of fishing.

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