

Clive (Foxy) Dennett—A311704—Engine Fitter

The hardest part of this tale is getting the first sentence onto paper and, as different from life since Wagga, there doesn't seem to be any lucky break coming my way to get started.

Good luck has been an ever-reliable factor in the life of Clive and it has always outweighed any bad breaks that have come my way. I have always had the benefit of the old adage, one door shuts and another opens. Even from the very start after Wagga and for some time thereafter, it looked like those who had to return to RSTT after graduation had lucked into a good decision as, for a long time, we were the only ones who would qualify for pro-rata long service, etc. We would complete a full fifteen years: January 1954 to March 1970 whilst the others would have three until December and then twelve ending in December. This was later changed to recognise three plus twelve equals fifteen but for a long time it looked like three plus twelve equalled fourteen years, nine months.

My greatest interest other than family and work has always been cars. The first of the pictures was prang number one in 1958, one of several over the years and it was the worst. Most of the others were heavy hits but not really hurtful. As luck would have it none of the following did much harm other than vehicle damage and hurt pride. A rolled Wolseley 1500, a '48 Ford V8 navigating in a rally with Russ Gamble at ARDU, a Datsun 1600 stuffed backwards into a tree in Penang, a Toyota Corolla rally navigating in Malaysia, and a soft head-on in a Celica near Cann River in the 70s. However, none of this has ever diminished my interest in cars and in particular rallying. Until recently I had a restored Morris Minor and a well maintained Wolseley 1500, both of which were used in car club activities and the Wolseley in classic rallies.

The highlights of my rally activities have been as a navigator in the Malaysian Toyota Works Team and competing in the Wolseley in the last Dutton's Rally to the last Adelaide Grand Prix in 1995. I still drive or navigate in the annual "Climb to the Eagle" and Southern/Northern GPs which are carry-over noncompetitive events celebrating the Dutton's and the Adelaide Grand Prix. My present transport is a current model Holden Barina SRI, 92KW in a small body with all the good equipment usually found in cars a couple of classes up the food chain and it goes like a rocket. Strangely, in seventeen ownerships I have never owned a six-cylinder or V8 in my life.

My most recent motoring activity has been (read retired from) the director of operations of the Bay to Birdwood Run in Adelaide. This event is for veteran, vintage and post-vintage cars in even numbered years and for classic cars in the odd numbered years. Both these events are supported by the SA Government Major Events Corporation and are recognised as the largest and best events of their type worldwide. In addition to organising these two major events I was the executive director of the Adelaide International Motoring Festival which had the overseas marketing responsibility for the SA Government.

Probably the best part of these activities was making friends with people from all over the world whose interest is in cars, and in most cases could not care less about who you are or were. Many of these meetings developed into lasting friendships for which I am very thankful. My experience in Butterworth as the OIC of the Car Club (who wants to be OIC of anything?) as a representative on the motor sports section of the Malaysian Automobile Association and clerk of the course at the first Penang Grand Prix gave me a great insight into the politics of event organisation and provided me with the experience I needed to run major events. I handed over the car club responsibilities to Les Bunn when I left Butterworth for Central Flying School at East Sale. Les was one of the few direct connections I made with other Mangoes during my service years.

Since Wagga the job front has been kind and very varied, with each gathering of experience and knowledge coming into play at some time or another and even today I am still working part-time, using past skills to provide a "hobby job".

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The first of my lucky breaks after Wagga came as a result of the Morris Minor prang while I was at ARDU. The only subjects in which I had been anywhere near above average at both school and RSTT were technical drawing and mathematics. Therefore, the only suitable job while recovering was in the drawing office. I was able to develop my drawing skills and learn about reprographics, photography and printing, all of which came to the fore after I departed the RAAF in 1981.

On retirement, my first employment was as a chauffeur for six months to a high profile Adelaide businessman who was able to use my air traffic skills to get around some problems with his aviation activities. This employment decision was made to give me some breathing space and to become aware of what being a civilian was all about. It turned out to be a good decision on my part. The businessman's local influence and contacts then led me to the oil and gas producer Santos where I landed a casual six-month job in their mapping department. However, with some of my ARDU skills and air traffic digitising mapping experience coming to the fore I finished the allocated task in about three months. They then asked me if I could sort out some problems in the reprographic department, attached but not integrated to the drawing office. By the end of the six months the two departments were integrated and I was managing the reprographics department. Later this led to other opportunities as a civilian.

While at ARDU and back on the hangar floor, Phil Donnelly was selected to go on a Mirage course to, I think, Williamstown but apparently the timing of the course and the arrival at Avalon of A3-1 was stuffed up and they needed an engine fitter to work on the reassembly project at Avalon. Who better to select than a local lad from the nearby village of Lara. What a lucky break this turned out to be. The engineering officer at Avalon was none other than Les Bunn and the whole thing with A3-1 was difficult due to a lack of support facilities, spares, etc but very successful. We got the aircraft flying and about this time I looked at the promotion prospects as an engine fitter and decided to apply for air traffic control. All I needed to get in was to pass some aptitude tests and get some good recommendations and beat about one hundred and forty applicants for ten places on the course. How lucky to have been sent to Avalon and to run into a good boss like Nubby! Air traffic control and Central Flying School here I come. Hullo to Bruce (Shadrack) Taylor another Mango seeking a new direction on No 33 ATC Course. This was the last NCO course and the immediate future for ATC was direct entry officers.

This was the turning point as far as Air Force service was concerned. Air traffic control was right down my alley. The skills required were all from my best suite, my personality suited the task and there was nothing about ATC that phased me in any way. The direct entry officers provided an incentive to beat the system and to catch up with, and then pass them in the system. Did it happen? Read on dear Mango.

I found the job reasonably easy and above all enjoyable. It took a long time for me to start to lose interest and that was right at the end when it seemed highly probable that I was headed into ATC administration and policy. Time to go at age forty-two with twenty-six years service, a solid superannuation, a new wife and plenty of time to build another career as a civilian. After initial training, air traffic took me to East Sale and then Pearce where I was selected in front of stiff competition from some direct entry officers and long serving NCOs to do a radar course and I took to that like a duck to water. Back to Pearce and onto Butterworth were I got my first training officer position as radar officer.

This was another lucky break, I really enjoyed the instructor role and added another skill to the set to be used later. What more could you ask for? A job you enjoy, three kids doing well at the Penang Primary School, a developing hobby in the car club and exposure to the joys of a fully funded, factory backed navigator seat in the Toyota Malaysia Rally Team.

Somewhere between the radar course and Butterworth I went to Point Cook and passed the

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Officers Training Course where I managed not to embarrass the school adjutant, one W.J. (Leo) Pike very often or much. Although, from memory, I think some of us may have nudged the limits a few times, particularly as the course was divided equally between ex-SNCOs and direct entry officers. Competition was both severe and at times rather primitive. I am positive the good guys won the battle. However, for the truth to be known a check consultation with Leo would be required. I think that years later I ran into Leo again in Learmonth, WA on an attachment but once again Leo would need to be consulted. Following Point Cook, and using the direct entry officer incentive program referred to before, all the promotion exams were passed and promotions were all completed on schedule.

After Butterworth I received my first preference posting to Central Flying School at East Sale and on arrival met an ex-navigator cadet and ex-NCO controller, Bob Skinner. Bob and I were the first two ex-NCO controllers to be selected for instructional duties and given Bob's ex-cadet status I was anointed as the first non ex-aircrew instructor at the school. Fame, as minor as it was, had finally come to me although I think I am the only one to remember or acknowledge the fact. Bob and I became great friends and remained so for many years until Bob died some time ago. We set about bringing some changes to the school and trying to elevate its status from a poor cousin in CFS to as close to an equal partner as we could.

Our first task was to become accredited instructors, something that had not occurred before in air traffic and something that was opposed by many as it would set a precedent for other instructors, particularly those in residence. We managed to get onto an advanced navigators course and completed all the ground based components of the course. We then set out to have all air traffic instruction on flying instructor, advanced and basic navigator and air electronic officer courses conducted by air traffic rather than the course instructors. This was a battle fought in the CO's office, in the briefing room and the flight hut but the battle was finally won in the officers mess bar. Our acceptance as equal partners in the instructional field was felt nowhere more than on the CFS annual "survival exercise". Look at the picture, you can see the "felt nowhere more" part on my face. It is a shame I don't have a picture of the nether regions as that depicted the "felt nowhere more" much better.

CFS continued to be a place of firsts. We changed the transition from theory to live aeroplane instruction from model trains and blackboard models to scripted, multiple slide projector sessions with full sound and recording facilities in a replica tower environment. This was about equal to the transition from horses to motor cars. We trained the first Army controllers, the first Singaporeans, Malaysians, Indonesians, Papuan New Guineans and, believe it or not, Nigerians. Nothing was too hard; we even trained the first female controller and were not that popular with the old hands when she passed. The Nigerian students were a great challenge to the school, they were all from privileged backgrounds and could not understand the need to do their own washing. Task one, teach them how to operate a washing machine and do the ironing. Task two was even more difficult, teach the officers mess that a student in a kaftan was not breaking mess dress standards.

After CFS I was posted to East Sale as the training and standardisation officer and this was another lucky break. It was an easy move and I didn't have the problem of establishing my credentials with both the staff and aircrew. East Sale lasted until the start of 1977 and provided me with a fire officers course which was to come in very handy later in civilian life. About the time I became a civilian, occupational health and safety was becoming the next big industrial thing and qualified fire officers were very thin on the ground. Having the service background of accepting secondary duties without too much complaint and the fire officer training I soon found another niche which would lead to better things.

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At the end of 1977 and very much to the surprise of a great many in air traffic a promotion to squadron leader and posting to Amberley came through. The promotion fulfilled my ambition to catch and pass the direct entry blokes as I came from the back of the pack at about forty-second on the seniority list in the record time of just over six years against the average for air traffic of about ten or twelve years. This was the last rank and posting for me and the promotion put me just where I needed to be in three years for the maximum benefit from superannuation at twenty-six years service at age forty-two.

The last twenty years have been eventful and very satisfying. During my time at Santos a retired RAN lieutenant-commander asked me to join the administration team and to take over lease management, building maintenance, fire safety and warden training, and given my interest in cars, fleet management. This was a time of rapid expansion in the oil and gas industry and I soon had a portfolio of some thirteen CBD leases in Adelaide, at times one or two in both Sydney and Melbourne to manage along with all the contracts associated with administration and building services. It was also the 1980s with all the expansive spending, weekly business lunches and jollies all over the country. After about six years I was approached by a major South Australian law firm to take up a new position of administration manager and decided to make the move as the challenge to manage the final stages of a new office construction and fit out was too good to resist. This job gave me the chance to use nearly every skill built up over the years including air traffic control because that is not much more than an exercise in multiple problem solving. The law firm was interesting to say the least. I could not believe the luxury and the effort put into making life comfortable for ourselves in the workplace. After so many years I thought I had arrived in civilian working heaven. By this time Meredith and I had two children, Melodie and Verity, and we had just managed to save enough money to convert our under main roof garage into a family room and add a double carport. Luck, that constant element in this tale, came to the fore once again and our work syndicate managed first prize in Lotto the weekend we moved the firm into the new building. Seventy-five shares at ten dollars a share from a pool of \$990,000. You do the maths, but it paid for the extensions.

My next move could be described as all the bad luck rolled into one. Ego took over from good decision making processes, and I accepted the offer to manage a brand new, SA State Bank-financed, export cold store on the international side of Adelaide airport. Plenty of scope to use the skills but if you know anything about South Australian history you may remember the State Bank disaster. What a fiasco, we went bankrupt twice in two years and I was the first to go as they tried to save the business. However, there was still enough in the kitty for me to escape with all my entitlements, but now at fifty-two things started to look grim. The economy was shot, we had two primary school kids and I couldn't get an interview for anything.

Too old, too experienced or not experienced in the right things. And then, a suggestion that I apply for a job with Workcover as a case manager. Workcover were recruiting about one hundred and thirty case managers and after some strange tests and interviews I was duly appointed as a case manager in training. What a shock. Workcover was a relatively new statutory authority but steeped in all the traditions of the cardigan-equipped public service. I could not believe that I could be selected from outside with about ninety percent of the applicants from within the corporation or the previous government Workcover agency. To this day I believe that I may have been the annual Age Discrimination Act quota. Never mind, I had the jump on this lot as my experience with direct entry air traffickers had shown that the best way was to put your head down and get in front. We were stuck in an on the job training system with home assignments and competency assessments to obtain a certification for case management. I managed to get the certification in the first ten to qualify and then within ten months had applied for and won the job of building manager within the

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corporation. Not long after that there was a reorganisation and my CV indicated that I could take over records management, archiving service, supply contracts and the mail centre and this was to be my last full-time appointment. However, other than bulk mailing there were no new skills, and posting letters is not that hard. After another three years another reorganisation occurred and with great good fortune I was made redundant and sent on my way on full entitlements. In the SA Public Service, if you are over fifty-five with five years service you get the big M redundancy, one with the lot. A handy sum I might say.

At this stage I was still running the Bay to Birdwood and the major sponsor, the Royal Automobile Association, asked me if would like to have a look at their history section and see if anything could be done with their historic motoring memorabilia collection. What a break, a part-time job, cataloguing and storing motoring history from 1903 onwards and being paid for the privilege. It equates to putting a sex maniac in charge of quality control in a brothel. In September 2003 I went full-time for the month and organised the RAA's one hundredth anniversary parade and then switched back to part-time. In between times I deliver and pick up 4WD hire cars and utes from all over SA with the occasional interstate sortie.

What a life since Wagga. Very little has gone wrong, very much has gone right, luck has been a fortune and the journey has been great so far.

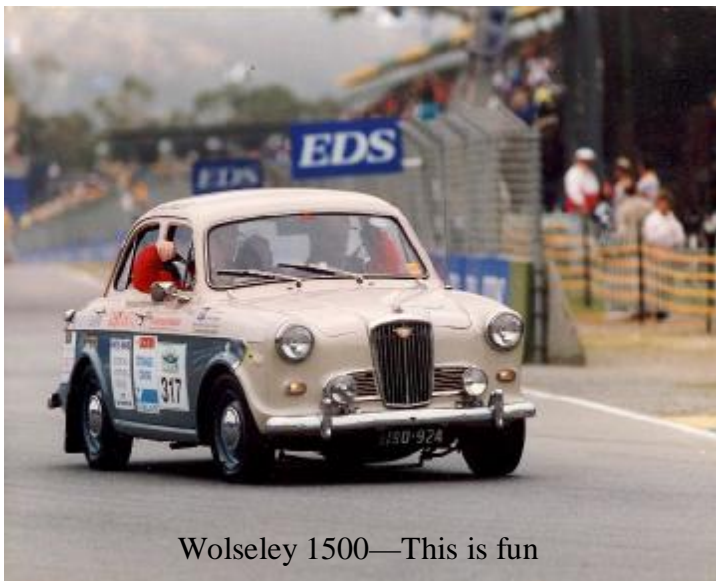
Finally, I would like to thank those who gave me the nickname Foxy! It has always been very handy to trot it out, particularly when there has been a need to bluff someone and make them just a little wary.

Thanks.

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A young Foxy At Wagga



Wolseley 1500—This is fun

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Why do this?



Morris Minor—that hurt

MANGO SCRAPBOOK IMAGES

R.A.A.F. Recall

By

L/App. Black, W. M.

The three old airmen, veterans all,
Paused a moment to recall
The days when life for them was gay, —
They were looking back on Reunion Day.

These three airmen though old and grey,
Remembered well their younger day,
And when they thought of days gone by,
There came a twinkle to their eye.

They thought of the day when as rookies green,
They joined the R.A.A.F. Apprentice Scheme,
They found the life was good but yet
For the first three years they had their regrets.

The weather at Wagga seemed never right,
Too hot at day, too cold at night,
Winters were bleak and often wet,

And summer heat soaked their clothes with
sweat.

But then at last they graduated,
The rank of A.C. they were rated,
Their thoughts were happy, their spirits bright,
And life ahead for them seemed right.

The years passed by and scenes unfolded,
From their early training their lives were
moulded,

They liked their work they thought it swell,
They knew their job they did it well.

And now that life was almost through,
The Service days left for them were few,
They'd done their job, they'd had their fun,
There were no regrets by anyone.

Bill Black's poem noted in his story— from *Apprentice Journal* 1955