

Geoff McCallum—A216391—Armament Fitter

I was born at Blacktown, outside Sydney on 10 November 1938. I attended school at Blacktown till the end of grade three. From grade four, I attended the Marist Brothers School at Parramatta till the end of second year in 1952. The family moved from Blacktown to Oatley on the Georges River at the end of 1952 and I attended Marist Brothers High School at Kogarah for third year in 1953.

I left home in January 1954 at the age of fifteen years to join the RAAF as an aircraft apprentice and underwent training at the RAAF School of Technical Training, Forest Hill, about eight miles east of Wagga Wagga on the Stuart Highway. The course lasted for three years and I graduated as an armament fitter in December 1956. After leaving Wagga I was posted to No 2 Aircraft Depot at Richmond, NSW to complete a further twelve months on the job training before being posted to No 77 Squadron, 78 Wing at the RAAF Base Williamtown.

While based at Richmond I was able to spend most weekends at home at Oatley and it was during this time that I met Wendy Thompson from Kogarah. We were married on 11 October 1958. Wendy and I spent the first months of our married life in a rented house at Nelson Bay, not far from the base at Williamtown. Wendy moved back to her parents' home in Kogarah when I was transferred to Richmond before departure for Malaya on 13 February 1959 when Nos 77 and 3 Squadrons were posted to Butterworth to join No 2 Squadron as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve during the Malay Emergency.

Married quarters were not yet available on Penang Island so Wendy had to remain in Australia. She arrived at Butterworth approximately six weeks later with many other wives and families. We were allocated a small semi-detached house at Tanjong Bungah.

This was an exciting time as the majority of the servicemen and their families were very young and a large number were newly married and for most it was the first time they had been away from home, let alone being away from Australia. Apart from sightseeing and pictures most of the entertainment had to be self-generated. The Australian Hostel at Tanjong Token was the main meeting place and many great nights and days were had there. Dances and badminton were two of the most popular activities but most sports were played regardless of the heat and humidity.

Our first daughter Deborah Ann arrived on 8 July 1959, the day after Wendy's twenty-first birthday, at the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Penang. This hospital was run by an American senior staff and was a blessing when it was accepted as a medical facility for RAAF and Army families. Up until this time all service wives had to travel to Tiaping, a British Army hospital, sixty or so miles away and, because it was in an unsecured area, expectant mothers had to be admitted two to three weeks ahead of their due date so that there would be no need for last minute dashes for the hospital, especially after curfew.

Duty at Butterworth consisted mainly of more of the same training as we had done at Williamtown, gunnery, rocketry and bombing practice on the end of the strip or from the flight line, broken up by routine servicing in the hangar and rotation through 478 M Squadron to carry out major servicings.

We did however take part in a couple of operations against terrorist camps with the aircraft loaded with HE bombs, HE rockets and HE ammunition. We never heard any results of these operations; maybe we killed a few monkeys, like 1 Squadron from Singapore in the early days of the Emergency.

One day, during one of these operations, we wondered what had happened when Ken Tuckwell came back with what looked like blood all down the side of the aircraft and the canopy blown away. It turned out to have only been a bird strike that broke the canopy and caused a few minor cuts but the slip stream certainly spread the blood.

Mango Stories

Geoff McCallum—A216391—Armament Fitter

Cards were a major form of passing the time, be it on the ferry to and from Butterworth and Penang or in the crew room waiting for the aircraft to return or the weather to clear. Five hundred and Ricketty Kate were the games of choice and some very serious games were played over the years.

About twelve months after arriving on Penang more suitable housing became available and we moved to 12A Tanjong Bungah Road, Tanjong Bungah - opposite the Gurka leave centre and remained there till departing Penang on 24 August 1961 on board the *Stratheden* for the trip home via Perth.

Our second daughter Tracey Lee was also born at the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital on 20 May 1961; she was just three months old when we boarded the ship. The girls had been given Malaysian citizenship when born so they had to be naturalised as Australian citizens before we could leave Malaya. This was done through the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

The trip home was a great experience - first-class on the *Stratheden*, except that Wendy had a cabin on her own with the two babies, while I shared a cabin with another airman.

Back in Australia I was posted to No 1 Central Reserve at Kingswood. 1 CR was what was commonly known as a bomb dump. The duties there included the servicing of all types of explosive devices: bombs, ammunition, rockets, etc. Being a non-operational base the routine was much the same as a normal eight to five job, with the exception of the occasional base duty at night or on weekends.

We rented a house in Victoria Street, Kingswood and the wider family started to get to know the two girls. Both Wendy's and my families still lived in the southern suburbs of Sydney: Wendy's at Kogarah and mine at Oatley on the Georges River.

Daughter number three, Leanne, entered the world in a hurry on 29 April 1962 at Penrith Hospital.

Kingswood at this time seemed a good place to settle and raise a family, so making use of a war service loan I was able to purchase a house and land package at No 9 Jean Street, Kingswood and moved in about October 1962. The loan was for 2,650 pounds. As well as setting up the new house I also assisted with some of the work and landscaping at my parent's new house at Algernon Street, Oatley. I also helped my brother Brian, who was now a licensed electrical contractor working for himself. The work was mainly on wiring home units during the latest building boom at the time in the Ramsgate and St George areas of Sydney.

Debbie started school at the Catholic Primary School at Kingswood in 1965. Life was becoming settled and I was promoted to corporal. Then in June I was notified that I was again posted to 78 Wing in Butterworth. This time the family travelled together and were flown from Richmond RAAF Base in a chartered DC 6 B aircraft. We had to travel via Perth and Cocos Island: Indonesia had banned all flyovers of Australian service aircraft during their Confrontation with Malaysia. The trip took twenty-four hours and was quite an ordeal, especially for the children. Debbie was nearly six, Tracey four and Leanne three. Fortunately all the passengers were RAAF families and mostly in the same age range so it became an adventure. The stopover at Cocos Island was a welcome relief if only for a short time. It was a lovely place even though we only saw the area close to the airport.

On arrival at Penang we were transported to our new home at No 1 Jalan Merbau, Tanjong Tokong. The organisation was much better than when Wendy arrived on our first tour. The house was not far from where we had lived at Tanjong Bungah. Conditions had changed somewhat, but a large number of families were back for a second tour and old friendships were quickly renewed. Debbie started school at the RAAF school and settled in well, Tracey started school in 1966 and Leanne went to preschool. During this second tour there were race riots in Penang and on the Malayan mainland, with twenty-four-hour curfew and armed

Mango Stories

Geoff McCallum—A216391—Armament Fitter

escorts on the transports to and from the base at Butterworth and families not allowed to leave married quarters. Rations were delivered by RAAF trucks. Indonesian Confrontation continued, the squadrons at Butterworth were on twenty-four-hour alert and detachments were sent to Borneo and Singapore and the Vietnam War was escalating. No 79 Squadron had been formed at Ubon in northeast Thailand and was manned on a two-month rotating basis from Butterworth. This was not supposed to be officially known and the changeovers were made on the supply Hercules that came through Butterworth each week to supply the base at Ubon. Aircraft were changed by two aircraft taking off from Butterworth and meeting the two aircraft returning from Ubon north of the Malay border, the replacement aircraft would fly onto Ubon and the returning aircraft would land at Butterworth in their place.

I had two attachments to Ubon during 1966. While on the second trip to Ubon I had the opportunity to visit Surin for the annual festival and elephant roundup. This was a great experience, especially as it now seems to be mainly a tourist attraction and not a local event as it was then.

During 1967 Wendy and I went on a train trip from Penang to Bangkok and Chiang Mai and return. This trip was very enjoyable and we saw much of the Thai country side including visits to the native Karen villages in the hills above Chiang Mai near the Burmese border and the floating markets near Bangkok as well as many of the famous temples and the palace of the king and the house where Anna of *The King and I* lived.

The family left Butterworth on 19 December 1967 on a chartered Boeing 707, much better than the trip up, and arrived at Mascot to be met by one of the coldest December days on record on the 20th. After Christmas leave in Sydney with families I left for Wagga to take up a posting at RSTT as an instructor. The family followed in January and moved into a rented farmhouse at Gumley Gumley, between Wagga and Forest Hill on the Stuart Highway. From the cold greeting at Sydney, the heat and lack of humidity at Wagga was a shock; most days the temperature didn't fall below 100 degrees F before nine or ten pm. During the day trainees were sent to the swimming pool when the temperature reached one hundred and twelve degrees in the classrooms. This happened most days for nearly three weeks.

The three girls, Debbie, Tracey and Leanne, were enrolled at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Wagga and soon settled into life back in Australia. They also took up marching and travelled the local area to march in competitions. I also became involved in the administrative side of the Marching Girls Association and served on the committee.

The family moved from Gumley Gumley into married quarters at No 7 Buna Street, Ashmont about June 1968 and set up home for what appeared would be a long stay. Because of this the house at Kingswood was sold. Wendy obtained a job as secretary at the *Wagga Advertiser*, a local newspaper, and the financial situation of the family improved. About 1969/70 a new innovation in Catholic education was trialled in Wagga. Trinity College was formed in the grounds of St Mary's Primary and Mt Erin High School. The college was to be coeducational and cater for students in forms four and five and was to be staffed by both lay and religious teachers. Wendy applied for and was appointed to the position of school secretary. This was very handy as the girls were at school on the same block only a few yards from where she was working.

I finally took up bowls while at Wagga; my father Sid had been trying to convince me to do this since I arrived at Kingswood. It proved a good way of becoming more accepted into the local community as service families were not readily accepted by the locals.

After a relatively short time for a posting at Wagga, during which I was promoted to sergeant, I was posted with effect 24 May 1971 to No 5 Squadron at Fairbairn, Canberra. This was due, no doubt, to the requests for an overseas posting. As the senior armament person I was also responsible for all armament facilities on the base. This was not a popular

Mango Stories

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move. The girls were well settled in Wagga, Debbie was now in high school, Wendy was enjoying her job at Trinity and no-one wanted to move. The move to Canberra was made and the blow softened somewhat by the transfer of Wendy's brother Barry and family to Canberra. This is the closest we were ever to live to family during our time in the RAAF. On arrival in Canberra the family moved into a two-bedroom flat in Scullin. Accommodation was very limited in Canberra at the time and the waiting time for married quarters was at least twelve months so it was decided to purchase a house and settle in Canberra. The house selected was at No 5 Starke Street, Higgins in the Belconnen area, not far from the flat in Scullin so the girls wouldn't have to change school again. Debbie was at Catholic Girls High, Braddon and Tracey and Leanne were at Page Catholic Primary School.

Not long after arriving at No 5 Squadron I was notified I would be posted to Vietnam on the September rotation. This was later deferred to February 1972 but because of the impending withdrawal was cancelled in December 1971.

Life settled down once again and I became involved with the formation of the Belconnen Bowling Club and served on the committee for some years.

A very good friend from Malaya days died suddenly at Christmas time 1971 and Wendy and I were off to Melbourne for the funeral of Roy McLaren. Roy's widow Shirley and three children had to leave their married quarters and weren't sure where to go or what to do. We suggested checking out Canberra and Shirley arrived a few days later and did just that. Various problems with the RAAF were sorted out and Shirley decided to buy a house and bring the children to Canberra to grow up.

This also started another activity for the McCallums: camping. The McLarens were camping and fishing enthusiasts so the next few Christmas holidays were spent camping at Tathra on the far south coast of NSW. The McLarens had been there for a couple of years and it was there that Roy suffered his heart attack while out fishing on their boat. He was only thirty-nine years old.

Service with No 5 Squadron helicopters was fairly uneventful after the end of action by Australians in the Vietnam War in 1972 and apart from exercises with the Army, flood relief or bush rescues the only interesting exercise I was involved with was an accident investigation in Indonesia. A helicopter had had an engine failure while assisting an Army survey unit working on Sumatra and had to make an emergency landing on the top of a hill on a small island off the coast. A new engine being flown out to replace the unserviceable one was dropped from the sling on another helicopter. It was dropped into swampy jungle and never recovered. I was a member of the investigation team sent to find what went wrong during the transit of the new engine. It was an interesting few days. The team also had a few free days in Singapore waiting for an aircraft home. This was nearly a flop as on the way up we had included some Aussie cheer for the boys on Sumatra in the boxes of spares and these were opened by mistake by the movement control bods at Singapore. They were not impressed and told us we would be confined to the base on our return from Sumatra. It took some fast talking and a few signals back to the squadron for us to be given our pay and allowed off the base at Singapore. The return trip also enabled us to see Christmas Island; the Hercules returning the investigation team to Australia was diverted to Medivac a heart attack patient from there to Perth on the way back from Singapore to Australia.

With life settled and the family happy I decided not to renew my engagement with the RAAF when it came due in January 1974. Thus ended twenty years service with the RAAF.

On discharge I obtained a position with ARC Engineering as a contract officer and was with this firm for three years: first at Fyshwick and then at Queanbeyan when they relocated there. Through contacts at ARC I learned of a camping ground at North Durras that had permanent van sites, and in 1975 purchased a large caravan and put it on site there. We had many good times there. It was sold in 1978.

Mango Stories

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During this time my marriage to Wendy broke down and we separated in 1976. I left ARC at the end of 1976 and took a position with Warren Simpson Billiards servicing pool tables, juke boxes and pinball machines. This job also entailed relief work for various outback NSW technicians so I was able to see a lot of the west and northwest of NSW. Towards the end of 1977 I applied for a job with the Commonwealth Police and also as an industrial arts teacher with the Catholic Education Office in Canberra. I was offered both these positions and accepted the position as industrial arts teacher. This new job entailed working part-time at two schools: Saint Francis Xavier's at Florey on the north side of Canberra and at Padua Catholic High School at Wanniasa on the south side. The deal was to teach at SFX in the mornings and then drive to Padua during the lunch break to teach and set up the new department there during the afternoons. Padua was a new school and had only opened in February 1978.

When our divorce became final in November 1978 I purchased a townhouse at Latham: No 11 MacFarlane Place - not far from SFX. At the end of 1978 I had the option of staying full time at SFX or Padua. I opted for Padua and became head of the Industrial Arts Department and form master for the senior year students. I taught industrial arts for three years and during that time also had some responsibility for the setting up, maintenance and purchasing for many of the departments. At the end of 1980 it was decided that the time had come to have a full-time bursar for the school. I applied for and was appointed to this position beginning at the start of the school year in 1981. The girls had been growing up during this time. Deborah on leaving school started nursing training at the old Canberra Hospital and graduated as a registered nurse in 1979. Tracey also started nursing training after leaving school in 1978, but sat for and passed an enrolled nurse examination before completing the registered nurse course. Leanne didn't complete her year-twelve certificate; her first job was a temporary laboratory assistant in the science department at SFX. She then completed a secretarial course at Canberra TAFE and joined the Commonwealth Public Service.

The start of 1981 was also beginning of a new phase in my life. On 11 January 1981 I married Maureen Patricia Boylan. We had met at the beginning of 1978 when we were both members of the staff at Padua, Maureen having been appointed as a primary teacher when the school opened. After marrying, Maureen and I lived at Latham for a time before purchasing a forty-acre property on London Bridge Road, Burra, about twenty kilometres from Queanbeyan. While the first stage of the house at Burra was being built - I did as much as possible myself with the help of subcontractors for the major jobs - we lived in a rented house at 67 Harrington Court, Kambah, ACT. With the lower section of the house completed we moved to Burra around June/July 1982. The upper section of the house was almost completed twelve months later and the move upstairs was made.

With the house almost completed we started to look for a way of using the land and finally decided to introduce Cashmere goats into our lives. The initial stock was purchased in February 1985 with some white does from Jim Snow - the local federal member and some coloured does from Rob and Kathy Barrett. Kumburang Cashmeres was born. Prior to the purchase of these first animals we had joined the Cashmere Growers Association and I had been involved with the regional committee as editor for the local newsletter for the previous twelve months. This had proved an excellent method of contacting other growers and learning what Cashmere growing was all about.

1985 was also the year of the big fires in the Canberra/Queanbeyan area. A state of emergency was declared for three to four days and during this time some tense moments were experienced, but luckily most of the Burra Valley was not burnt thanks to the efforts of the local bush fire brigades and some fortuitous changes in weather conditions. I served as a member of the Burra brigade and on the committee of the brigade for four to five years.

With the goats now becoming a major interest we started showing the goats at the Canberra Show in 1986 with great success: supreme champion and novice breeder awards in 1986

Mango Stories

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together with numerous minor awards. These successes continued and with the introduction of Cashmere classes at the Cooma and Tarago Shows, successes were also achieved there and on the one occasion when our goats were shown at Penrith for the Sydney Area Show, animals either shown or bred by us won all the major prizes. As the quality and number of goats was increasing it was realised that more land would be a benefit. As funds were limited it was decided to go into partnership with a couple at Adaminaby; they had the land, we had the quality goats. Unfortunately the partnership did not benefit us to any degree and was dissolved in 1989.

By this time we had purchased a block of land at Tantawanglo: forty-three acres in the Bega Valley. So, after completing some fencing, the goats from Adaminaby and some of the goats from Burra were taken to Tantawanglo. We were now only working part-time, me at Padua and Maureen at St Anthony's, Wanniassa, for three days per week. This allowed me more time to develop the property at Tantawanglo. Early in 1992 we had a valuation done on the Burra property with a view to planning our retirement. Within a couple of days the estate agent rang to say she had a buyer if we were prepared to sell. An offer was made and accepted and the Burra property was sold and settled on 31 May 1992.

As we now had no residence, we shared a house back in Canberra till the end of the second term and tended our resignations from our respective jobs, a little earlier than originally anticipated. July 1992 saw us moving into a temporary dwelling on the property at Tantawanglo. A new house was started in November 1992. It was a pole frame structure, again built by me with subcontractors. We moved in in June 1993 - a large section on the lower level was enclosed in January 1994 to complete the building.

In 1993 the situation with the goats was looking bleak, the price of fleece was very low and the demand for breeding stock was almost nonexistent because of the low fleece prices and the onset of drought. Animal numbers were reduced during 1993/94 from two hundred and sixty-five to sixty-five and no does were joined in 1994. With the continuation of the drought and the rising costs of feed a review of the viability of the Cashmere enterprise was undertaken in 1996 and the decision to sell all the stock was made.

We were now what could be termed retired. We still had the land to maintain but no stock to worry about. I had been involved with the Bega Valley Genealogy Society as treasurer, and the Candelo Show Society since 1993 and became increasingly involved with other voluntary organisations through these contacts. The most notable being the Bega RSL Sub-branch where I was asked to take on the job of treasurer due to the illness of the current treasurer. "It will only take a couple of hours a month to do the job." That was over eight years ago and I now spend at least two to three days a week as treasurer, assistant welfare officer, historical officer and newsletter editor, but I find it very rewarding most of the time.

In 1998 while on our way to the Genealogy Society at Pambula we had lunch as usual at the mouth of the Pambula River. On our way back from lunch we saw a house for sale just near what we considered the best spot on the coast. We made inquiries and purchased our new home overlooking the river mouth and north along the coast to Merimbula. We sold Tantawanglo and moved here to Pambula Beach in June 2000.

Last year we treated ourselves to a trip over to the UK for just over six weeks touring England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales by coach and then we went back to Ireland and Scotland in a hire car and did our own thing.

Life is pretty good - I don't know how I had time to go to work for all those years, though.

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Mango Stories

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L to R : Me, McEvoy and Dennett, unknown at rear - Hut 302

Dressed to impress one of our first outings to Wagga



My Basic flight 1954

L to R back row: Dixon, Canning, Ward, Williams, Creswell, Gilbert, Melbourne, Middlebrook, Landers, Malone, Dan. Centre: McCallum, Denovan, Fiddes, Lambie, Ostila, Payne, Thornton. Front: Gillard, Simpson, Best, Smith, Foreman, Patterson, Hodge.