

Roy Nancarrow—A216399—Engine Fitter

The history of my working life will have to start at the beginning. That was the day I arrived at Wagga, on a Monday morning I think it was. The night trip in the dog boxes from Sydney was my first introduction to the RAAF. A couple of the chaps had been in the Air Training Corps and could talk with some authority, it seemed to me, about the life I was about to enter. Arriving at Wagga we were transported in “the snake”, that semi-trailer, to Forest Hill.

Something of a blur then, but I ended up in hut 111, containing a mixture of Apprentices and JEATS. Looking about and seeing the chaps from South Australia, who had arrived before us, and their haircuts, was a bit of a shock. That evening the boot polish and vegemite appeared and I remember the battle between the Apprentices and the National Service chaps down on the obstacle course.

Very soon things started to be sorted out, we were given a number, some of our uniform, a rifle (No E65570) and then the bullring. Injections near, or in the cinema, come to mind. Standing in line with the needle in the arm and the various syringes being attached as we moved forward. The scratch on the arm for smallpox, then back out on the bullring. The “Kapooka” stripe will bring back some memories of that time I think.

Three years at Wagga, and it was then time to join the “real” RAAF. Having come from NSW I was posted to Richmond, travelling on the night train from Bathurst, after our leave, at a cost of one pound, thirteen and two pence. The expected six months at 2AD was extended to one year before we were posted to a flying unit to complete our five-year apprenticeship. For some reason I was posted to South Australia while most of the other engine fitters were sent to East Sale. As can be imagined, this posting was to be an important step in my future life.

While in South Australia I met and married my wife before being posted to Butterworth in Malaya and Ubon in Thailand. Returning to Australia I spent time at Laverton before being posted to Amberley in preparation for training on the F111. At this time it was necessary to sign on for another five years and, while I could see some future for myself in the RAAF, I thought it would be better for my children in the long-term if we returned to South Australia.

Back to Edinburgh for my discharge, but we had a problem. Our personal records were posted in those days and my records ended up in Scotland. This was no bother as I was still being paid and I only had to phone up now and then to see if they had been found. It was now time to find some work. Before leaving the RAAF I had started doing the necessary examinations required to obtain a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer’s qualification. There would have been no problem getting a job, however it would have meant starting in Melbourne and, at a later date, applying for a transfer back to South Australia. Not much change to being in the RAAF, I thought.

While at 1AD I had the opportunity to do a course in ultrasonic inspection at Support Command in Melbourne and later refresher courses at Amberley where a few of us were trained to check sections on the Canberra aircraft. Using this knowledge I was able to obtain a job with Automation Sperry which was a commercial testing company. Most of their work at this time was associated with the X-raying of pipe welds due to the introduction of natural gas from Moomba. I was not involved in this work but did other work in the various fabrication works around Adelaide.

During my time with Automation Industries I also worked interstate in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and the Northern Territory. While in the RAAF I had some experience in magnetic particle and dye penetrant testing as well as the already mentioned ultrasonic technique. At Automation Industries I learned to use X-rays, using both X-ray machines and isotopes. The work in Queensland was the testing of Thermit welds in rails between Sandgate and Redcliff. These were perhaps some of the first weld of this type in Australia

Mango Stories

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and certainly the first time they had been tested using this technique. As it turned out, this again was to become an important part of my knowledge base.

After some five years with this company, and the end of the installation of the gas mains in and around Adelaide, they decided to close the Adelaide office. I was well established in Adelaide and had no desire to move my family to Melbourne or Sydney. At this time the South Australian Railways were in the process of removing their plated rail joints and establishing a continuously welded track. This required inspection of the new Thermit welds using ultrasonics. It also required them to purchase a machine and find someone to teach some workers to use the machine. Automation Sperry manufactured and sold ultrasonic portable ultrasonic machines and I was the only person in SA who had any knowledge of testing these welds. South Australian Railways bought the machine and I was engaged to train several chaps in the testing of Thermit welds. In short it didn't work all that well and at the time the Adelaide office of Automation Industries was closing the railways were looking for a knowledgeable person to become involved in the testing of rail and rail welds.

In August 1975 I joined the railways in South Australia. A few years later the South Australian Railways became part of Australian National (Railways) that became Australian Rail and Track Corporation (ARTC). The rail work was contracted out to Transfield Services and while I spent some time with ARTC my work in 1999 was also put out to contract and I become redundant. After some months of being out of work I was "called up" by Transfield Services and offered a position as the NDT inspector doing the work I had been doing with AN and ARTC. I was given back all my ultrasonic equipment and my Hi-rail vehicle doing the job I had developed over the years. I was offered full-time work and asked to be employed as a casual, which they agreed to.

At the present time I am still working for Transfield services as a casual employee working a little less than half-time. My aim is to now complete thirty years in the rail industry. Much has changed since 1975, more rules and regulations and more training. During my time with the railways I have trained other testing people and this year I had the chance to introduce ultrasonic rail testing to Transfield inspectors in New Zealand.

Not all my life has been involved with work, so after raising our four children, my wife Rosemary and I started doing a bit of travelling. Over the years we have managed to return to Penang in Malaya a number of times and visit other countries and islands in that area including Vietnam, Bali, Thailand, Sumatra, Java, Singapore, Langkawi, Vanuatu and Sabah. In Sabah we climbed to the top of Mt Kinabalu and watched the sunrise over the South China Sea. In addition we have had several trips to New Zealand and one to Norfolk Island.

Much of my spare time is spent in my shed where I can do both metal work and wood work with the tools and equipment I have collected over the years. Working for both Automation Industries and for the railways I have managed to invent, manufacture and modify tools to make some aspects of my job easier.

Soon after joining the railways I thought I would like to get back into motorcycling again. I had one for a short time at Richmond but soon traded it in on my first car, a 1957 VW that I kept for many years. I started again with a 125-cc Yamaha, progressed two years later to a 250-cc Suzuki and two years later to a BMW R65LS, a 650-cc machine which I still have although it is now not registered. When I do retire I will then decide if I want to keep it or do a few trips on it once again with Rosie, when she retires as well.

In South Australia we have a group of No 8-intake Apprentices: Brian Biggs, Clive Dennett, Garton Wake, Ian Melbourne, Gordon Sapwell, Alan Wythe and one JEAT, Graham Dunstan. We meet once a year or on special occasions. One such sad occasion was when Tom Barrett died after a long fight with cancer. In February next year we will gather at the home of Beverley and Garton Wake, known as "Mohawk" at Wagga before he left the

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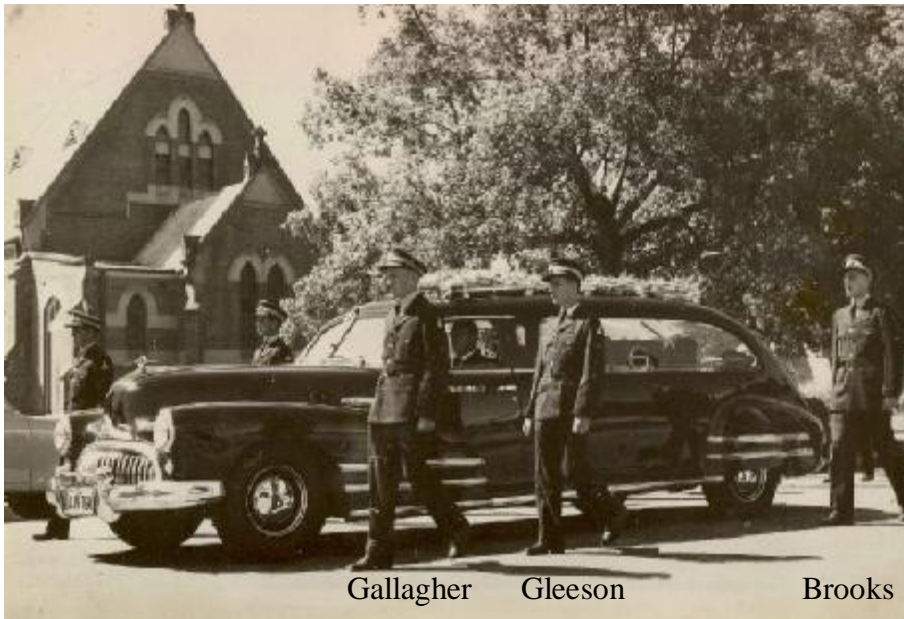
RAAF. Since leaving the RAAF and associating with other chaps who served apprenticeships in other industries, such as the railways, at about the same time as we did I don't think they shared the same "camaraderie" for want of a better word. I suspect living together for three years and defending each other from the earlier intakes was a form of "bonding" denied to the normal apprentice in those days. I cannot claim to have enjoyed all the experiences I had in the RAAF but, on reflection, it was an enjoyable and memorable part of my working life.

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MANGO SCRAPBOOK IMAGES



Guard of honour and escorts at funeral of apprentice Lex Dunn
accidentally drowned on 24 February 1956



Gallagher Gleeson Brooks