

Tom Scutts—A216411—Armament Fitter

My view of things past

You might say it's preaching to the converted, but for me, as with most of you reading this, it all started "there". Need I say more? Initial memories are those of Hut 112? There was Mick, Leo, Horrie, the Smiths (PG, JN and who could forget Trunky) as well as Pete Rose, Ron Reilly, Peter Showell and Brian Shorthall.

Please excuse any omissions or errors, of which there must be many, but as this is a deliberation of memories of highs and lows I'll use the excuse for my deficiencies being that at the early age of thirty-one years I suffered a heart attack, which to this day I contend, using current terminology, erased part of my memory bank. That event occurred whilst at Butterworth in August 1969, and at the time my wife was told that my return to Australia would be in a "box", and also written in my medical documents is the annotation that I had a fifty percent chance of survival for ten years. Am I pleased that now, aged sixty-five years, those bastards got it wrong!

Having now digressed, let's get back to Wagga Wagga where for all of us the graduation and subsequent celebration was most enjoyable, well at least till the next day for me and my attending family for when we left by car the next day we had only gotten almost to Young on our way to Sydney when a tyre blow out and subsequent double rollover took the shine off the previous day's celebrations. Thankfully we had no injuries, and because of the previous night's imbibing I hardly knew or cared much what was happening. The remainder of the 50s, at least for this writing was of little consequence, but for me marriage and a son did have an effect on the direction and thinking to my future.

The start of the next decade being 1960 found me and family, after a five and a half-week sea voyage, in England. Here we were, flush with cash (\$42), been in London three days, off you go to start a basic guided missile course in Nottingham. Look for somewhere to live at night. Those were the days when "do it yourself" really meant, "do it yourself". A cash advance prevented destitution, which was a relief after being prostituted by the system. The training both at Nottingham and then at Bristol on the Bloodhound SAM system was great. This was followed by a further nine or so months on the job training on an actual front-line Bloodhound missile site.

Whilst in the UK I was able to attend the Farnborough Air Show of 1960, which for a young LAC was enjoyable and enlightening. International co-operation came to the fore on this occasion as I had not confirmed any accommodation near the air show and looked destined to spend the night on the street, but I was fortunate to find an American Army base nearby and was able to get a bed in the cells at their guardhouse.

A further eye opener on this posting occurred when after the training courses, I had to observe the installation process of missile launchers in the north of England near York where the SAM site was being installed adjacent to a THOR intercontinental missile site. This was the 1960s and the Cold War was still in vogue. The occasion went like this. I turned off the road onto what was an old wartime air base only to be stopped by American MPs who were responsible for security of the THOR system. I didn't mind that the MP who got out to question why I was there was the size and racial persuasion of Michael Jordan, but the size and proximity to my head of the barrel of the 45 automatic that he pointed at me caused quite some anxiety.

Yet another Cold War story was at times when working on the missile site in the east of England, the Klaxon would sound to indicate that the missiles would have to be fully activated ready to fire and the area to be clear. On these occasions I was able to then go to the control centre where we could watch the approach of the "Russian aircraft" and the missiles tracking them until they reached their designated point where they would turn away. I sometimes wonder what might have been had they not turned away. This was an

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occurrence that I was able to observe on several occasions.

As proof that all my time was not taken with work it was at this time that I first became involved with go-karts much to the disgust of the other two tenants of the flats where we were renting. The building was an old church rectory and our section alone comprised thirteen rooms with an outlook over part of the local cemetery. The main benefit of this place was the fact that it was just outside the base and close to medical as we were expecting our second child (English weather). But the neighbours, both Pommie flight lieutenants were not impressed that a mere LAC could not only afford the rent but also have the audacity to actually live there. We never became close friends; perhaps it was that we were Australians or maybe it was that I ran the go-kart round the front driveway from time to time. The on-base crew with whom I worked on the missile site were completely different and very friendly. In fact whilst at Butterworth 1967/69 I was fortunate to meet one of these Pommie blokes who was there on posting with the later Mk.2 Bloodhound system. It was pleasing to meet up with him again.

Arseholes and armpits

That's got your attention now; so let's find ourselves in Paris late 1964 after spending three months at Point Cook learning to converse in French. That initial expression best describes the Paris underground railway system during peak hour in the middle of winter. This was how we got to and from the factory where we were to learn about the Matra missile system for the Mirage aircraft. To say it was close and crowded would be an understatement and the only saving grace was when you could find yourself close to one of the more attractive locals to add enhancement to your journey. I consider myself most fortunate to have been chosen for this training having only spent a few years after the previous overseas training on the Bloodhound system. I really enjoyed the experience of working with the Matra system for the time that I was able, both back in Australia and then in Malaysia, and again back at Williamstown.

Unfortunately being in Paris through winter was not conducive to much outside activity which meant that most evenings were spent having extended meals and copious quantities of "Plonk", which to this day I must confess I am still to some extent partial. Toward the end of the attachment we had a visit to the south of France not far from the border with Spain and close to the Pyrenees ski resort of La Mongie where on one weekend we were fated to skiing and a most magnificent luncheon, again with much plonk; and there is truth in the fact that the liquid stream from the body does create somewhat yellow holes in the snow. Another occasion for anxiety occurred when returning down the mountain with a Frenchman driving at the normal erratic pace, primed with plonk, and wearing ski boots rather than normal footwear.

I also recall, at this time, an occasion at the hotel, in the south of France, at which we stayed when in the dining room the lady of the house having been briefed by John Monkhouse on the Australian terminology for the parson's nose was heard throughout the dining room to loudly make reference to the chicken's arse. How cultured are we Australians?

The previously referenced posting to Butterworth was, except for the heart attack toward the end, enjoyable as I was still working with the Matra missile system, but apart from work, there was the enjoyment of participation with go-kart racing as well as other forms of motor racing within the scope of the Butterworth Motor Club, which at the time was quite strong, being able to hold many and varied types of events. It was at this time that I met the bloke I consider to be the closest friend I have ever had. From Butterworth he went on to Vietnam and after that experience he was never the same. On his return home, and to civilian life, he suffered various skin rashes and he never seemed to be the same, but only a hollow shell, until one day when returning home from work he just drove off the road and died. A great

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loss for me.

Outside the missile workshop at Williamstown was the flight simulators and the source of a great deal of pleasure for me when the Sabre simulator was transferred from the solid building to transportable cabins to be sent to Indonesia. After transfer it needed a great deal of testing which I was more than willing to provide. I was also able to try my hand at the Mirage, and some time after, during a live fire of Sidewinder missiles at Jervis Bay I was fortunate to get a ride in a twin Mirage to witness the actual live firing of a missile. It's not often that an armourer gets to see the end product of missile work and as such I found this experience rewarding.

As with most things in life, good things don't always last, and for me in 1974 a posting to Melbourne, and with both kids in high school in Newcastle, I made my decision not to move the family and so became a civilian. After twenty years it took some time to settle down, but at least there was no problem at those times in getting a job. I spent the first few years fixing typewriters, etc and then moved to selling these types of items before moving on to the company with which I spent the next fourteen years until retrenchment in 1993. With this company I had some productive years in sales both at Newcastle and two years in Brisbane, giving me, as well as salary, several all expenses holidays and many minor prizes over those years. Again, changes in policy meant changes for me, back from Brisbane to Newcastle to a computer support role and then courier driver as the various jobs were centralised to Sydney. My final stint as courier driver was ideal as work was only Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, leaving a four-day weekend every weekend. It doesn't get much better than that.

Although there are probably other tales to relate, perhaps some of the detail may not be conducive to good taste, or might lead to infringement of other's privacy. In conclusion I can only say that I feel privileged to have started my first full-time career those fifty years ago with those who will read this and those whose tales I will be fortunate to read. Together we have been through an era of advances in technology, and the basis of our experiences and training have given me, and I hope you, the confidence to attempt most tasks that we have encountered in life to this time, and I hope to remain in the same frame of mind for many years to come. My philosophy being, "Things work out best for those who make the best out of the way things work out."

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What were we thinking in 1954?

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On the start line Malaysia -me closest to camera



Fifteen years already?
Where did it go?



My two favourite jobs