

**Don Smith—A216417—Mechanical Transport Mechanic**

**From Tindall to Townsville via Exmouth: a trip to remember**

There are very few people who have the privilege to live out a dream, but towards the end of my thirty-eight years of service in the RAAF, the wheels were put into motion for that dream to come true.

Each day when I was on duty as WOFF in charge of transport section at RAAF Tindall, Katherine, NT, apart from carrying out my daily routine of duties, I found myself looking at a large framed map of Australia and dreaming of visiting all the RAAF bases in one trip, i.e. Tindall to Townsville via Exmouth.

During my time in the RAAF I had either been stationed on or visited these stations/bases on occasions. I mentioned my dream/wish to all and sundry during smokos of wanting to travel this vast continent one more time before retiring.

Late October 1991 the CO dropped in for smoko one Friday morning, with me not realising the real reason for his visit. Unbeknown to me, the wheels (pardon the pun) had been put in motion and much planning had taken place. The outcome of the CO's visit was that I was handed an EE380 (running card) movement order and the keys to an Acco semi loaded with miscellaneous cargo and was advised to go for it.

The CO confirmed it was all legit and repeated, "Go for it." I did not need to be told three times.

Bloo Campbell a WOFF MT fitter also an ex-Appie, 1973 27th intake, travelled with me. We left Tindall bound for Townsville with a cargo of misc. The forward planning was obvious at Townsville as it also proved to be at every base we subsequently visited.

Amberly was next with much fun and, "Good to see you, Mate," from all the troops. Thence to Wauchope, my family home for much needed rest and recuperation to restore vigour and vitality to my mate Bloo. As for myself, it was a wonderful time spent with my family and to enjoy a breather for, if the receptions at the previous bases were any indication, I knew what we were in for in our travels.

Williamtown, 2 Stores Depot and Richmond excelled themselves and again we had a great time renewing old friendships. No 1 Stores Depot Laverton and Point Cook messes were visited and then on to Edinburgh and across the Nullarbor to Pearce, Bullsbrook which was next on the agenda, followed by RAAF base Learmouth on Exmouth Gulf. We made it. We stayed with Paul and Ruth Betts, the local fuel contractor at the base (ex-RAAF) and enjoyed superb hospitality once again. The fishing was an added pleasure!

At Exmouth we met up with Allan Goodie and George Boss, caretakers at RAAF Learmouth and ex-5 ACS boys. It was then on to RAAF Derby, a bare base with caretakers with a taste for fishing once again in residence. All the necessary equipment: boat, motor and gear, was supplied by our hosts, ensuring a very pleasant time on the Fitzroy River. Wonderful memories.

At each stop we helped each other not to stray too far from the straight and narrow (road that is). We did what was expected of us, apart from having a damn good time delivering cargo and loading more for the next base.

The only mishap on the entire trip, was a trip! Leaving Halls Creek Pub, I blew a thong! This may not have happened had I been wearing my wobbly boots.

Back home to Tindall after 15,189 kilometers and thirty-two days on the road; friendships renewed, meeting old mates and their families, all of whom made us more than welcome in their homes.

I have lasting and very happy memories of the dedication and commitment of so many members of the RAAF, Australia-wide who enabled me to thoroughly enjoy myself.

A dream trip.

## Mango Stories

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### **MT fitter history**

Provided by A48377 Peter “Bloo” Campbell, 27th Intake 1973 “Rats”.

The Royal Australian Air Force was formally inaugurated on 31 March 1921 and consisted of twenty-one officers and a hundred and twenty-eight other ranks. In April 1921 at two locations, the basis of what was being referred to as No 1 Aircraft Depot was formed. These locations housed general stores in wheat sheds rented from the Victorian Railways at Spotswood and Motor Transport Repair Section in vacant brewery buildings at 470 Nicholson Street, North Fitzroy. This section was under the control of Squadron Leader E. Harrison with a complement of three officers and fifty-six airmen. Motor Transport Repair Section continued to exist at North Fitzroy until April 1922 when it moved to Point Cook.

In mid May 1921 Flight Lieutenant A.Cole and his companion set out in a hired 1920 Dodge touring car which had been used during a recent Prince of Wales tour to survey a suitable air route from Geraldton to Derby. The following is an extract from his diary:

“We got along slowly following tracks roughly in the right direction, just crossing country wool wagon tracks ... between station homesteads, with occasional party telephone lines erected along a fence to save posts, which we used as guides to settlements. We sometimes took two days to go a mile, and wore out four tyres, all our blankets, and half our clothes in getting that distance ...”

After floating the car across the flooded Wooramel River south of Carnarvon, Cole and his companion found themselves in an increasingly desperate situation. Delayed by repeated boggings which eventually saw them run out of food, they went to sleep in the car one night thinking they were set for an early start in the morning.

“It rained steadily with heavy thunderstorms all night. At daylight the next morning the car was sitting in a lake about twenty miles wide which reached up to the floorboards. Our suitcases which we had placed outside the car to make room for us to sleep had floated away. Collars and shirts were floating amongst the mulga scrub, there was no breakfast and the situation was grim. We had no food for two days and nothing seemed to be stirring in that vast country.”

After walking to Glenburgh Station three days later, the men then returned to Perth only to find the government had decided to let a civilian contract for the north-west mail route. It had been a joy ride after all (things have not changed much)!

In 1923, Corporal B.D.Thacker, a motor driver mechanic, started a voluntary station band with himself as bandmaster. This resulted in the formation of a band, at Thacker’s suggestion, to take part in ceremonial parades outside the station. Was this the origin of the RAAF Central Band?

November 1923 witnessed the transversing of northern Australia from Cloncurry to Darwin by Flying Officer G. Kindred and AC1s Kelly and Newson (truckies) marking out a proposed airmail route and suitable landing grounds. This was accomplished by covering 2700 kilometres in two model T lorries (AF 401 and AF 402) specially purchased by the RAAF for this purpose.

In 1947, at Wagga the first adult motor transport fitters course began. The only non-aircraft trade to undergo apprentice training was motor transport fitter which began shortly after in 1948. In 1960 an education officer at the time recalls having to teach musical notes to motor transport fitter courses. When he consulted his senior education officer as to the relevance of these actions, he was told: “MT fitters have to appreciate these notes in order to tune vehicle exhaust pipes.”

In 1968 a report concerning field problems within the MT mustering is quoted as saying: “MT trade requirements already cover an extremely broad engineering field, which combined with refrigeration and air-conditioning, electronics and other likely areas

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Don Smith—A216417—Mechanical transport Mechanic associated with the new joint warfare commitments, could reach an unrealistic level of training requirements for any particular tradesman.”

Further progression within the MT sphere in June 1980 saw the “Truckie Boss” EngMech finally disappear into history. Many deep connections and friendships were cemented throughout this era. The following obituary appeared in the *Canberra Times* on 30 June 1980:

*Farewell to Eng trucks*

*First off production models*

*20 March 1942*

*Remodelled 10 October 1969*

*End of run 30 June 1980*

*Restored, to be advised.*

*May their diff whines never fade.*

So time passes by and waits for no-one. Time has spluttered for the “Truckie Machine” and scheduled maintenance plans are being drawn ...

*To all the fixers*

*of the many mixers.*

*To the sorters of bits n pieces*

*From twenty-two*

*to ninety-two*

*Farewell from me to you.*

*From the many faces*

*in heaps of places*

*We may well get the jitters*

*as we say a fond farewell*

*To all the MT fitters.*

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Wagga May 1955 L to R : Me, Malone and Pointon.- “Any idea where we are?”

Mango Stories

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R.A.A.F. CANTEENS COMMITTEE  
(APPOINTED BY R.A.A.F. CANTEENS SERVICE BOARD)  
Tobacco and Cigarette Ration Sheet for  
**R.A.A.F. PERSONNEL**

No. A216417 Name SMITH DJS  
Section M.T. Month of February, 1955

13 30 Cigs	14 2/3 oz. Tob OR 20 Cigs	15 2/3 oz. Tob OR 20 Cigs	16 2/3 oz. Tob OR 20 Cigs	D
9 1 oz. Tob OR 30 Cigs	10 1 oz. Tob OR 30 Cigs	11 20 Cigs	12 18 Cigs.	C
5 1 oz. Tob OR 30 Cigs	6 1/2 oz. Tob OR 20 Cigs	7 1/2 oz. Tob OR 20 Cigs	8 20 Cigs	B
1 1 oz. Tob OR 30 Cigs.	2 1/2 oz. Tob OR 19 Cigs.	3 1/2 oz. Tob OR 19 Cigs		



Hut antics L to R.: Lambie, me holding Bunn's legs, Carlyon T and Black.

My cigarette / tobacco ration coupon



Ready for action L to R : Standing- Fiddes, Hobbs, Harwood, McFarlane, McDonald, Hodge, Bunn, Black and Carylton T. Kneeling - Me and Keeton.