

Anthony Wilkins—A216429—Electrical Fitter

The confessions of a misspent, but fortunate and lucky life

The saga

1954 - 1960 RAAF Wagga, Richmond, Fairbairn, and Richmond, as an aircraft electrical fitter. I started pilot training in January 1960 but after seventy-three hours failed to achieve the required standard. I was transferred to CFS East Sale for ATC training, graduating as a sergeant ATCNCO.

1960 - 1969 RAAF Woomera, Darwin, Townsville air traffic controller - tower, approach, area and operations. The most significant thing to occur was not my failure to be commissioned but rather meeting my wife to be on a blind date on New Years Eve 1962 in the Sergeants Mess, Darwin during the wet season. We got married five weeks later on 8 February. She was a theatre sister, "ten-pound" Taffy, travelling around the world. Hmmm! Our daughter was born in March the following year and our son a year later. Both are in the Top End.

1969 - 1978 On leaving the RAAF I joined the Department of Civil Aviation Transport, Darwin air traffic controller primarily employed as an operations controller in liaison with military services, customs, police, health, airlines, private operators, public and technical staff. Operational control was exercised over other relevant flights, briefed pilots and assisted in search and rescue operations.

Cyclone Tracy was perhaps the most pivotal point in our lives. My wife Sylvia was the charge sister of the gynaecology ward; it was heavily damaged and abandoned on Christmas day despite our endeavours to clean it up. Sylvia was transferred to casualty for several months, then to community health which included visiting the ship *Patris* which had become an accommodation ship for many.

The DCA ATC areas had largely been taken over by other DCA units: Perth, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Mt Isa and Alice Springs, Katherine and Port Hedland. We who were left had little to do. Not so the RAAF. The RAAF who exercised local and approach control had to abandon the control tower and operated from the DCA fire watch tower for a long time to come. I would especially like to draw the attention of other Mangoes to the diligence and application of Bruce "Shad" Taylor and Herb Cavanagh, in keeping the show on the road together with his associates during an extremely trying period, in this tower and Darwin.

1976 - Department of Transport ATC transfer to Sydney. I thought I was going to Camden (promises, promises!) and built a house in my home town of Springwood, however in the event I ended up in "Video Village" in the radar centre at Mascot where I failed to handle the traffic (land and air) after Darwin. I resigned, which was pretty stupid because if I was pushed, as was told to me later by the superintendent of operations ATC, I would have picked up my loss of licence insurance worth \$80,000 plus. Good grief, Charlie Brown! I then did a stint at the regional office as the buildings clerk in Airports Branch until I went to Kingswood.

1977 - 1978 Department of Defence - RAN Missile Maintenance Establishment, Kingswood NSW - technical assistant grade-2 calibrating missile and electronic test equipment. This was where many of those old SNCO tech types who you wonder about had retired to.

1978 - 1980 Department of Defence - RAAF Richmond, civil administration officer. I provided civil administrative assistance for about 130 civilians, to the commanding officer, senior administration officer and other section leaders, who didn't want it, particularly from an ex-SNCO and an air traffic controller to boot.

1980- 1983 Department of Aviation - Darwin Airport apron coordinator, to wit aeroplane parking boss. 1983 Certificate in Indonesian business, culture and language.

1983 - 1984 Department of Transport and Communications, Darwin supply officer. Perhaps

Mango Stories

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I was meant to be a JEAT!

1985 Department of Transport and Communications, business and property clerk. This bloke's versatile if nothing else!

1986- 1987 Department of Transport and Communications, Darwin housing officer. We had about 130 houses, with many staff on two-year transfers from Adelaide. I also acquired the nickname "Prince of Promises" - Yeah, I'll get you another fridge. And the "Mirror Man" - I'll look into it. Not a difficult role or title to achieve.

1987 Department of Industrial Relations (NT). Acting arbitration inspector carrying out inspections, inquiries and interviews to secure the observance of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act. Yeah! This was probably the hardest I worked in my life, particularly answering phone inquiries on more than 150 awards, pre-computer times. It was relieved by some bush work, inspections on the Barkley's cattle properties.

1987 - 1988 Department of Transport and Communications, Darwin. Terminal supervisor overseeing and co-ordinating terminal operations. This was an interesting time with much interaction with the public. The things people do at airports!

1988 - 1989 Department of Transport and Communications (NT) business, property and personnel clerk at Darwin Airport. Overseeing commercial activities: routine and bloody boring!

1989 - 1991 Federal Airports Corporation, Darwin Airport. - administration/finance officer. This was a very unsettling time as we had just been corporatised; "The government enterprise with the private enterprise philosophy" and I knew we would be made redundant in the not too distant future, particularly as I was the union rep. I, like many others, was made redundant from the Federal Airports Corporation - Darwin Airport in May 1991

1993 Intensive Bahasa Indonesian - Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga Central Java, Indonesia. 1997 bachelor in Southeast Asians studies - Northern Territory University - now Charles Darwin University. 2000 graduate diploma in Southeast Asian studies.

Since 1985 I have owned a forty-four-foot ketch and have competed in five Darwin to Ambon in Indonesia until the "troubles". 1992 master V (trading) certificate. I have also participated in the three Trans-equatorial - Ambon to Bitung (Manado, North Sulawesi) races. However, on our last trip we lurched from disaster to disaster taking five months instead of five weeks to get back to Darwin. On this trip Warren (Arthur) (Mouse) Beckhouse sailed with Sylvia and me from Ujung Pandang (thank goodness the name has gone back to the original Makassar) to Bali. Mouse started on our intake but left after six months and became a very successful Navy clearance diver and later a leading oil rig diver master and barge master in various parts of Asia. He later worked for the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory (MAGNT). Alas, Mouse died of diving complications in November 1999 in Darwin.

I still have the boat but my financial, and particularly my cardiac situations prelude me fixing the engine, etc. I have been waiting three years for a valve replacement and by-pass, and anticipate having it done in Adelaide within weeks. I had been a volunteer guide at the MAGNT and have found it particularly rewarding and interesting, but am unfortunately unable to continue at this stage.

I am currently a postgraduate student, undertaking a masters of arts in anthropology - by research. These days find us in a Masonic Homes Retirement Village with about thirty dwellings - not bad.

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I am currently the president of the resident committee so you can consider me a father confessor. Note the aforementioned training as the housing officer. Well you never know! The only other Mangoes living here in the NT, as you probably know, are Don Smith, Shad Taylor and Pancho Gallagher.

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MANGO SCRAPBOOK IMAGES



Albury outing 1956 L to R : Morris, Malone, Heins, Hodge and Pointon.



Graduation parade march past 7 December 1956