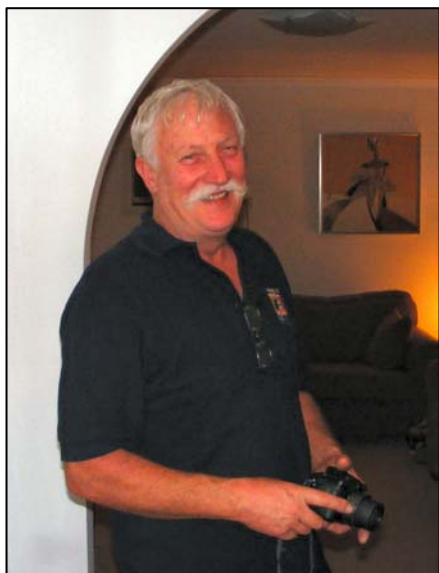


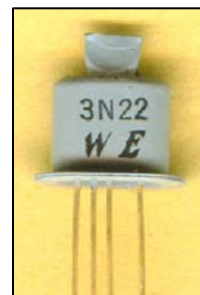
RAAF BASE EAST SALE. PARADISE IN COUNTRY VICTORIA.

Kev Rosser.

I arrived at Sale at the tail end of the Christmas, New Year break in 1969, to an almost deserted radio section. I can't remember who it was, but one of the few troops not on leave warned me that the Warrant Officer in charge of the section, "Mad Dog" Otto Fahey, (deceased) would give me a verbal trade test in order to assess my potential, and that Otto's favourite killer question was for the person under test to be able to identify a component in the, at the time, new and marvellous AN/ARC-51 BX UHF transceiver. The component, a transistor with two base connections, which I have never seen before or since, was called a "[tetrode transistor](#)".



When Otto finally arrived back from leave and after greeting me, called me into his *office* and imposed his trade test on me, asking a range of easy questions relevant to our trade, then, with a flourish, producing a circuit diagram and pointing at it, asked "and what do you think this is?" I casually replied that it was a tetrode transistor.



Otto was flabbergasted and I was in!

Otto was one of the old school WOFFs and was a genuine father figure who ran his empire with an iron fist (and he had a couple of good looking daughters).

Did you know that a gold fish can only remember what it has done for the past 6 seconds.

Sale at that time was considered a horror posting - by everyone who wasn't at Sale. But it was a pleasant enough place for the 3 years I was there, allowing for the various characters that inhabited it. Otto Fahey, our fearless leader lived on the base with his 11 (1 think) children and his wife. They had 2 houses side by side to accommodate all the kids and also had a milking cow out the back to supply the gallons of milk required each morning for breakfast!



There were a number of places where you could work at Sale, and these included the radio section, Macchi flight line, HS748 flight line and the Dakota / Winjeel flight line.

Each place had its aspects, such as pumping up ARC S 1's in 19 Macchis during preflights each morning and changing the AN/ARN 52 TACAN which went u/s after just about every flight, cleaning vomit from headset microphones in the HS 748s, and sitting in Stan Stopinski's donga listening to tall fishing tales and learning to swear in Polish (as well as doing preflights on 2 Daks and 3 Winjeels)



The best place to work in winter was the radio section, where it was always nice and warm, and on a clear day through the windows you could see the snow on the mountains (you also had to put up with Stan Prosser and Peter Meneer).

Duty crew at Sale was an experience. You had to do a normal day's work then at stand down, go up to the [HS748](#) flight line, pre-flight and send off 4-5 HS 748s, fix any u/s aircraft then dinner and go to the duty hut which was a house not far from the airmen's mess. In the house the man-hole cover giving access to the ceiling was slid to one side so that one could throw empty beer cans up into the ceiling and I wonder to this day what happened when the building was sold and removed with its 1000s of empties rolling around in the ceiling.

Early in the morning (0200) we would all be up to pre-flight the Dakota which left for a fishing patrol down around Tasmania, then after breakfast, off to normal work. No wonder after a week of duty crew you were stuffed! The system gave us 2 days leave, in lieu of the some times 60 odd hours of after stand down work.

I was at an ATM money machine when an old lady came up and asked me to check her balance. So I gave her a shove and she fell over.

Memories of the weather at Sale are of cold wind, rain and fog, lots of fog, especially when driving back from Melbourne late on a Sunday night, and having to drive the last 60 km at a snails pace with visibility down to several metres. On the other hand, in the summer it was stinking hot with clouds of flies.

However I don't remember the weather getting in the way of a good "booze up". A favourite venue was Marley Point where there was a shelter shed or picnic place on the shore of [Lake Wellington](#) out along the back roads behind the RAAF base, and I remember a number of occasions crouched by the fire in the shed with a freezing cold can of beer wrapped in paper towel to stop my fingers from going completely numb, holding a smoking hot sausage in the other hand while a howling ice filled tempest blew in from the lake and we jostled for a place at the fire. Great fun!!!



I also remember standing on the roof of my Land Rover while it chugged around in circles with the hand throttle on, 50 metres out from shore in Lake Wellington, in a couple of feet of water until it hit an under water obstacle, threw me off and then nearly ran over me before stalling.

Back in those days there was no such thing as light beer (John Broughton would disagree with you there Kev – he invented it!) and who would have drunk it anyway? So the trip back from Marley Point was always exciting, and it was a good point that the roads were lightly used back roads with very little chance of meeting the custodians of the law!

It was after a Marley Point do that the “bomb” episode occurred. I can’t remember who suggested it, but we decided to pinch the Gunnies bomb and drop it in the main street of Sale.

The bomb was a huge day glow coloured practice piece weighing 500 lbs, sitting on a pedestal outside Gunnie section down near the flight line. I, with I think, 9 other conspirators on board drove my Land Rover on to the tarmac alongside the bomb and using the principal of “many hands make light work” we lifted it into the back of the vehicle, everyone piled in on top of it and off we went, but too fast ‘cause the bomb promptly slid out and fell to the ground whereupon the sheet metal tail became detached. We all jumped out, lifted the two pieces back in, which now fitted so that I could close the tailgate and we could depart the base without 3 feet of day-glow coloured tail sticking out the back!

Off into town we went and duly delivered the bomb to a centre street parking spot outside a pub which was just closing so there were plenty of witnesses (someone noted my rego and reported me to the police so I had some explaining to do the next day). I did a circuit around the block and came back to see how Sale’s gift was being received, when we noticed that the tail section was missing.

I almost had a psychic girlfriend but she left me before we met.

It turned out that some other enterprising chaps had happened along straight after we drove off and lifted the tail, taking it out along the Maffra road and into a dairy farmer’s yard, sticking it into the ground to make it look like a bomb had fallen from the sky! When the farmer arose the next morning he nearly had a fit! ! He called the police, the fire brigade, the emergency services etc! !



The end result was the Gunnies had to drive a forklift into Sale to retrieve their bomb and I was banned from ever driving on the Base again. I was posted to Townsville soon after.

I bumped into Craig (chook) Coombs one Sunday afternoon, and noticing a glum look I asked him what was wrong. Craig told me he had been over at [Maffra](#) at a friend’s place helping him complete the construction of a mini bike. (And consume some amber fluid.) When the bike was up and running, Craig was test riding it along the nature strip and ran full tilt into the driver’s door of the local copper’s patrol car which was parked in a driveway with it’s flashing light operating, inflicting a serious dent! The cop was understandably very pissed off, and charged Craig with everything he could think of including no helmet, unregistered unroadworthy bike, riding on the footpath and damage to police property. No wonder Craig was glum!

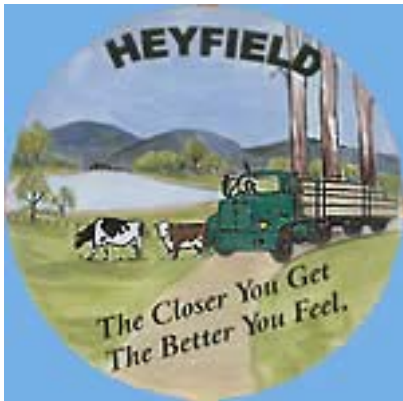
However Craig regained his composure and on Monday after work he dressed up in his IA's (full dress uniform), and went back to Maffra and fronted the policeman in his station, and grovelled so convincingly that the copper relented and let him off! !

One of the popular pastimes was bream fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and a favourite spot was McLemian's Straight where you could almost guarantee catching a feed. The ultimate bait was sand worms, supplied in a small cardboard box (with sand) and on a good night you could catch a fish with every worm. One memorable night when fishing with Craig Coombs, we were doing really well but lost all our sinkers to snags, so Craig, not to be outdone proceeded to use the wheel nuts from his Cortina and used 4 nuts before he decided it was time to go!

If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?

Another popular pastime was annoying rabbits. A "right of access" chit was obtained from the Gunnies, and along with a shotgun, plus several boxes of shells, we would drive after dark, to the Dutson Downs Bombing range and spotlight for the extremely smart rabbits, which inhabited the place. The bunnies there had been bombed, strafed and even had aircraft crash on them, so they were very difficult to shoot and I remember a number of times coming home having fired off 2 boxes of shells and not hit a thing!

I used to do fair bit of trout fishing in the mountain streams near Sale, and the Macalister River was a very good fishing river with beautiful scenery as a bonus. I found that there were a lot of trout in the very small tributaries to the river and I used to do some fairly hairy 4-wheel driving to get to some of the good places. One trip, with Lindly Coulter, an electrician, I managed to get hopelessly stuck on a slippery snow covered slope near the top of Mt Useless, a 4,500ft high hill north of [Heyfield](#).



We made 5 peanut butter sandwiches each and proceeded to walk, and walk, and walk eventually more than 30 km before a passing car took us the remaining 5 km into Licola where we were given accommodation til the morning and a friend rescued us. The land Rover languished in the hills for 10 days before I was able to mount a rescue mission.

We had a civilian cleaner in the radio section. His name was Paolo Rizza and even though he had lived in Australia for 20 years, he had a very thick accent and could not read or write very well. One of Paolo's duties was to take smoko orders to the ASCO canteen outstation near the flight line and bring the pies, sandwiches etc. back to the section in time for morning tea. Due to his poor grasp of writing Paolo would hand his note pad to people to write their order upon it while they were at their work benches, and some humorous soul, realising that Paolo couldn't read, wrote "Ruth please give me a f..." when the unsuspecting Sicilian handed his notepad to the canteen lady she read it and leaned over the counter and gave Paolo a resounding slap on his face much to Paolo's astonishment!!

At smoko time there was a concerted rush for the lunchroom, by the dedicated card players, in order to get a seat at the card table.

After Otto was posted and Stan Prosser was promoted to W. OFF VC, it was noticed that if Stan got a seat at the card table, smoko was a lot longer. From then on it was unobtrusively organised for Stan to get a seat at the card table, and we scored a 20-minute break!

It was while I was at Sale that I discovered the delights of home brewing, or more correctly single men's quarters brewing. In those days when there was no such thing as ready made cans of brew mix, you had to laboriously boil malt and sugar with lemon juice and then add the hops by way of using a pillow case with the hop flowers inside, dipped into the boiling brew. All this was done on a gas stove on my bedside table. I wonder what the local laundry thought of the brown, smelly pillowcases! The end result of my home brewing was 300 bottles of beer cleverly hidden behind my hanging clothes in my wardrobe, secure from the prying eyes of inspecting officers, and panic night piss ups to try and knock the quantity down.

Some of the names I can remember from my Sale days:

Jim Millican	George Vicino
Graham Vertigan	John Butler
Pat Godman	Craig Coombs
Bill Bastion	Bob Sturgeon
John Clelland	John Jolley
Otto Fahey	Chris Bell
Stan Prosser	Bob Tyler
Peter Meneer	Wayne Hall
Ian Schutze	Brian Deverson
Andy Speelmeyer	Bob Campbell
John Parker	Jeff Cuff
Don McDonald	Pete Aaron
Tim West	Al Chiesa
Al Mashette	Paul Nannes

Civilian Techs:

Ken (Blue) Alford	Dave Bentley
Mark Hope	Dennis??? Can't Remember)

And last but not least, WALLY FAULKNER. He seemed to be chasing me, he was at Laverton as a stroppy SP and when I was posted to Amberley he turned up there as a WOD, then when I was posted to Sale he followed me there!

Does anyone know what happened to him?

What happens if you get scared half to death twice?