

MY STORY.

Ernie Gimm



My story? Me? I really don't think so! That was my immediate response when asked to write a brief autobiography of some 2 – 3,000 words for the next edition. Who would possibly be interested in the life of Ernie Gimm? Then I thought, well maybe I should be honoured that someone has even asked me, so why not? Give it a burl - so here I am, warts and all!

On the 28th May 1942, this handsome, extraordinarily well behaved, modest, bouncing baby boy was born at some ungodly hour in the early frosty morning at the Stanthorpe (Qld) General Hospital. Life has been downhill ever since!

My parents owned a farm some 8 miles out of [Stanthorpe](#) at a place called [Amiens](#). Anyone who has visited Stanthorpe would know that all the farming districts around Stanthorpe are named after WWI battlefields; Poziers, Pashiondale and so on. Our farm was a little different in that it was termed a 'State' farm where our primary function was to produce fresh fruit and vegetable for the war effort and many of our labourers were POW's – mostly Italians and these were supervised by ladies from the Land Army.

I don't remember much of those earlier years except for an Italian family called the Pozies who my father had taken on as share farmers after the war. They had a son Eddy about my age and an older daughter about the age of my next oldest sister. We became good friends and indeed, I can still remember my first 'drunk' at the age of four when I was given two glasses of homemade Italian red wine with my dry bread and salami for lunch at Eddy's place. I was literally under the table and wasn't coming out for any-one!!

Why does Superman stop bullets with his chest, but ducks when you throw a revolver at him?

My childhood days were good days but, not having any kids around my own age after Ed's family left, I was forced to make my own fun – sometimes to the detriment of other creatures which resided on the farm. I can remember getting a hiding for shooting arrows at my mother's chooks. They were racing around the yard with reed arrows complete with 2" case nails bound to the tips, hanging out of the combs and wings. I think the marks from the hiding I got are still evident – maybe not visually but definitely mentally. I always had a pet calf, horse, joey, cat and a lamb – none of which knew who or what they were as they were always together in a group in the paddocks and were the best of mates. I just had to call and they'd all come running.



Generally, life was pretty mundane on the farm. The Primary

school was just a stones throw away and Dad was on the school Board so I couldn't get away with much there.

Prior to going to school, my jobs were to feed the pigs, chooks, milk three cows and separate the milk so that we had sufficient cream for our own butter. These chores got a little harder in the middle of the Stanthorpe winters when there was always frost on the ground and the frozen dry grass would crackle under my bare feet. I can also remember building a 4 foot snowman on our front veranda.

After school, most of my morning chores were repeated but only after I had helped out on the farm picking fruit and vegetables for market or spraying fruit trees etc. Some nights we would be up until the wee hours packing fruit or bagging beans and peas to have them ready for the train the next morning. In those days of course, we didn't have any electricity and used pump-up Tilley or carbide lights. I can still remember the smell of the carbide. These were also used for carbide guns in the orchards. When the gas built up, they would go off with a bang and scare the parrots out the peach, apricot, plum and apple trees. However, unlike most other farms in the area, we did have a large wet and dry battery operated radio and a wall phone!

Another regular chore was to hitch up a perfectly matched pair of old bay draught horses to a slay and take them down to a spring in the middle of the orchard to fill two 44 gallon drums with water. This was for washing and bathing (after I boiled the copper).

Why do they use sterilized needles for death by lethal injection?

Amiens was literally the 'end of the line' – train line that is. We were a 'branch' line off the main line from Brisbane to Sydney which branched at Cottonvale on the New England Highway. The goods trains used to come in during the early evening and stay overnight, ready to load produce and depart the next morning around 11am. My sister was the Station Mistress there for well over 30 years until the branch line was closed in the 70's – too uneconomical they said what with road transport. I used to enjoy riding the train through all the districts between Amiens and Cottonvale where we met the main line, then my brother-in-law who worked as a Loader on the train, would bring me home again. I also had the very important job of recording all the train wagon numbers for my sister, the Station Mistress. Wow! But at age 6, this was a most responsible task.

I finished my Scholarship (Year 8) at the Amiens Primary School where sports team in tennis, soccer and cricket although I never liked the after school for tutoring and training. I still detest cricket to this day!

My headmaster must have thought I had some scholastic ability as he persuaded my father, against HIS better judgement, that I should go on to secondary boarding school, so off I went to the Ipswich Grammar. There I established myself in the school tennis team by defeating the senior school champion in a round-robin event. I also became a member of the Army Cadets (no choice of Service here).

Unfortunately, at age 14, and after only a couple of terms at the Grammar, my mother died of a brain tumour. All of my father's spare cash was exhausted on operations etc so I was



withdrawn from school and sent back to the farm. Although my father said “this, (meaning the farm), will be all yours one day”, I told him what he could do with his farm and couldn’t wait until I was old enough to leave.

My school life looked like coming to an abrupt end. However, not to be deterred, I got a job on our local telephone exchange as an after hours telephonist. The post office was manned from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and till 12 noon on Saturday’s. Out of these hours, it was my job and that of another local lad, to man the switchboard a week about. For this we were paid 8 pounds (\$16.00). This was good money in those days but the hours were long but we could sleep at night. However, we did have the owner of an interstate transport company connected to the exchange and his trucks used to break down all over Aussie and mostly at early hours of the morning and would ring in for assistance. This meant many nights of broken sleep.

I mentioned this job as it was a means to the end as it enabled me to go to secondary school in Stanthorpe during the days. My youngest sister who was 6 years my senior (I am the baby of the family), was the manageress of Woolworths and she drove in to Stanthorpe each day for work. Dad bought a half share in old Ford Prefect (which used to keep jumping out of second gear and made for some interesting situations) with my sister who agreed, however reluctantly, to drop me off at school on the way past. I say reluctantly because, like most brothers and sisters, we fought like cats and dogs and, at 14, I insisted on taking my turn at driving, after all, I had been driving the farm ute and tractor for years even though I had to stand up on the tractor to reach the pedals.



Why is it that no matter what colour bubble bath you use, the bubbles are always white?

After High School, I had a part time job in a local sports store in Stanthorpe. My main jobs were to cut glass, make up drums of putty and restring tennis racquets. However, when I was 16, I saw a mate come home on leave in uniform from the Air Force. My life changed from that day and I was determined to join up. I don’t know how, but I managed to persuade my father to sign the application consent form. I didn’t have a copy of a Birth Certificate as proof of age but I did have a Certificate of Baptism which I professionally altered to advance my age 12 months. I was accepted and went to Amberley for a B Trade Test for a Telsop mustering – whatever that was! I had done a commercial course at secondary school so I could type and I knew how to operate a switchboard. I also knew a little morse code as we had many ‘party’ lines connected to the switchboard.

Sgt Doug Oliver took me for my test and I passed with flying colours so was accepted on 20th July 1959 and parcelled off to Rathmines for rookies – Course 508, and later, on to Ballarat on 54 Telegs.



54 TELEGS Ballarat 1959

Rear L-R:

Ed Cunningham, Barry Arnold, John Kitchen, Ed Joynson, Glen Muller

Front L-R:

Ernie Gimm, Nick Carter, Phil McLennin, Terry Blackburn, Ray Leape.

At Ballarat, they discovered that my age was incorrect after charging me 5 shillings for a Birth Certificate Extract. They probably should have charged me and kicked me out but they wanted their pound of flesh as they had been paying me Group 2 money from the day I joined as an AC and not an AC(R) like everyone else. All they did was stop my DFRB contributions and refund what I had already paid in. I remember doing picket duties at Ballarat during the winter around all the old hangars. This didn't last long as I soon got on the PABX roster in a nice warm switch room and bed. As I was typing some 110+ wpm by this time, I spent most of my typing classes in the morse room punching out morse tapes and working in the Ballarat Commcen. By this time I was sending and receiving morse at 16wpm and had applied to remuster to Teleg.



No 5 Teleprinter Op Course Ballarat 1959

L-R: Bev Taylor, Freddie Cadwell, Sally Maloney, Margaret Heath

This course ran in conjunction with 54 Telegs for the first 10 weeks.

Again, on financial grounds, this was refused and I was posted to a place called Frognall? Here I again came in contact with FSgt Doug Oliver and Sgt Nick Byrnes. The latter became my mentor. He moulded the rest of my life in communications even though I still bear the scars on my backside where he constantly kicked arse for “winding the channel numbers back to make them agree with my Out Check Sheets”.



Ballarat 1959 Taken outside our Hut.

L–R: Terry Blackburn, Ernie Gimm, Ed Joynson, Glen Muller.

Why is it that no plastic bag will open from the end on your first try?



1959 Ballarat.

L–R: Glen Buller, John Kitchen, Ed Joynson, Ray Leape, Freddie Cadwell, Terry Blackburn, Ernie Gimm, Bev Taylor.

After only a short stint at MTU, AC Gimm was posted to Butterworth in 1960. Still a country boy at heart, I thought that this must have been up near Darwin somewhere. I was delighted to find it wasn't and, as an 18 year old singly, had a ball for the next couple of years. I shared a room with Lac's Toby Longwill, Cowboy Cowan (Decd) and John (Speed) Reed (Decd). Gus Geoff was the WOff Comms and Jack Giddey the Sgt. Other names that come to mind were Cpl Shonky Shelton (Decd), my Shift NCO when he decided to turn up – mostly inebriated, Cpl's

Rod Louse, Bill Packer, Bill Lea, Ron Jones, Bruce Gluyas, Lac Jim Slatter, Ac Ian Greenacre, Ac Rod Williams, Paddy Brown, Don Brooks and Squizzy Taylor .

PltOff Sonny Maurice was the ARadO and SqnLdr Hornibrook was the boss. This is where I did my on-the-job crypto training with Ian Greenacre and Bob Harris who was at the 14MCRU commcen at the time. Cpls Bill Packer and Rod Louse were our instructors. Again my typing skills came in handy at Butterworth as we operated a BID510 circuit typing messages direct on-line to Singapore. (Many will remember the old rubber band trick around the switches to prevent the BID510 from breaking). I also remember going to Singapore to work in the Changi Commen and while there, attended a Moral Leadership course.

The night prior to the course starting, we were sitting around in the NAAFI (after closure) having a few stored ales and a sing-along when we were raided by the Red Caps. The word soon got back to Butterworth that Gimm had spent the night in the lock-up. Fortunately, they discovered I was an Aussie and didn't press charges. As it turned out, it was the GpCapt Padre who lodged the complaint about the noise so I got a bit more stick on the Moral Leadership course.



Moral Leadership Course Santosa Island off Singapore 1961.

Ernie Gimm 2nd from Left at rear.
Remainder were all RAF and one RNZAF

In May 1962, I got my first experience of digging fox holes/trenches when we were attached to Ubon Thailand, as an advance party in the emergency. At 4am one morning, we were issued with rifles, ammunition and a shovel and told to 'dig in' by WOD Chalky White. It turned out to be a false alarm but I was sure glad that I had the experience of Cowboy Cowan by my side.

Life in the RAAF after Butterworth was a bit of an anticlimax for a young single guy. I was posted back to Amberley, Ubon, 1SD, MTU, Nui Dat, Vung Tau, Townsville, HQSC, Radscl Laverton (Hangar 35), and MTU.

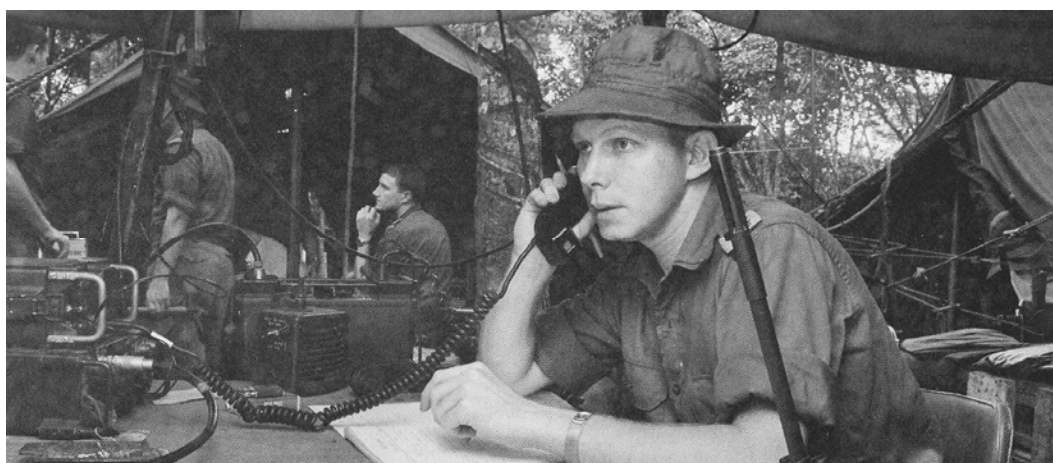
That was about 15 odd postings in my first 6 years.

How come you never hear father-in-law jokes?

While in Ubon for the second time in 1963/4, I celebrated my 21st birthday and was also promoted to Cpl. We celebrated by digging the last two coconuts out of the ground (the rest had exploded and blown themselves out), strained the juice through a clean handkerchief into

Bacardi rum. I ended up at medical a day or so later with alcoholic poisoning. A chunder every 10 minutes! Fortunately, the medical orderly, Gary Slade, was in my hut. I wasn't allowed to extend my attachment and was posted to Tottenham. While at 1SD, I received two Reprimands and one Severe Reprimand for being caught drinking and gambling in the living in quarters. I was reluctantly re-engaged, banned from Tottenham and posted back to MTU. Although these were some of my darkest hours, they were also some of my most enjoyable and memorable. Loved being a Cpl! Always in the shite!!

In June 1966, I was posted to Vietnam as one of the first three RAAF'ies to go to Nui Dat (Sgt Bruce Gluyas, Bix Dixon, Cpl Peter Hyland and myself). I will never forget working the choppers on Kangaroo Control during the Battle of Long Than (The photo below was taken from the Australian War Memorial's book "VIETNAM our war – our peace".)



Cpl Ernie Gimm,
A/G/A "Kangaroo
Control" Nui Dat
1966

Bill Dixon was our tech to assist with setting up. Bill's lackadaisical attitude made him perfect for the Dat. Before we left Vung Tau, the GpCapt asked if there was anything we needed as he wanted to do the right thing by us as we were living in VERY primitive conditions compared to the rest of the RAAF'ies at Vung Tau. We said we needed ice as we could only get 3 cans of warm beer each night. He said DONE and we had ice arrive on the first chopper flight from Vungers each morning. All of a sudden, the RAAF'ies became the most popular blokes at the Dat!

As another issue, Peter Hyland used to be a sparkie in civvy street. He wired out tents into the HQ 1ATF KVA and we had power shortly after we arrived which meant that we could run a refrigerator!!!!!! We carted sand from Vung Tau and made a beer garden between our 4 tents.....we hung a dart board and planted banana trees all around it. When the Army saw what could be done, many followed suit and the 4 RAAFies used to challenge the Army to darts nights etc.

In August 1969, I was selected as the first Telsopc to be employed in Systems Control at MTU. Des Gilliland was my mentor and Bert Keegan my boss. In May 1970 I was promoted to FSgt and attached to Control Data in Melbourne to undergo the first famil training on the Control Data 1700 Message Switching System (FRED) (Commonly called the ridiculous electronic device – tb) shortly to be commissioned at RAAF Darwin. Johnny Renfrew (Sgt) and myself were sent to Darwin to undertake the operational supervision of this system.



Alan Hyde, Clive Mackrow, Paul Egan and Russ Walker were some of the techs that immediately come to mind that were trained on this system.

When we are in the supermarket and someone rams our ankle with a shopping trolley
then apologizes for doing so, why do we say,
 'It's all right?' Well, it isn't all right.
 Why don't we say,
 'That really hurt, why don't you watch where you're going?'



Standing L-R: Peter Emery, Bill Rodick, Chris Kendrick, Phil Smith, Len Pascoe, John Huxley, Charlie Macmillan, ?? Bingham, Dottie Zammit, Peter Clifford, Ron Coups, Mick Gibson, Jock Ray.

Seated L-R: Bob Harris, Ron Vernon, John Renfrew, Ernie Gimm, Alan Hyde, Rex Raph, Del Delaney, Ian Armstrong.

In August 1971, I returned to Stanthorpe to marry the love of my life, Sect Officer Jenny Hickey. Jenny and I met when she was OIC WRAAF at MTU. After I left for Darwin, she was posted to Pearce where she resigned her commission prior to our marrying in Stanthorpe. We drove back to Darwin where we started our married life. I think we had about \$300 between us and I can remember sitting eating on boxes in our first flat. Jenny went back to her old profession of Radio Announcer on 8DN and later at the NT News. She joined the Public Service with the Dept. of the Northern Territory. In 1973 (July), we were posted from Darwin to DTels in Canberra. Jenny transferred as a public servant to DTel Eng where she worked in the tech library.

In 1974, while on a staff visit to Butterworth with SqnLdr Doug Roser, I was promoted to WOff and Doug to WgCdr. I became DCMC of the Sgt Mess at Russell and life became an awful lot busier.

We loved Canberra!

The statistics on sanity is that one out of every four persons is suffering from some sort of mental illness. Think of your three best friends -- if they're okay, then it's you.



Canberra 1976 L–R: Nick and Betty Byrnes, Dick Orr and Wife, Jenny and Ernie Gimm, Vi Hill, Judy Hopcraft.

In 1977, Sqn Ldr Bernisconi offered me a posting choice to either Butterworth or Washington. As Jenny had not been overseas before and I wasn't keen on the cold, we chose Butterworth, the best decision of my life. I took over from my nephew Shorty Rigden as Secretary of the golf club. I also had my sister over there who was married to the Asst. Housing Officer (W/Off Tom Creese) who played off scratch. I also had a cousin and a good ex comms mate, John McCormack who was AdminO at BSBut -. so it was a real home coming for us. Needless to say, we got a nicely appointed mainland house on arrival in Butterworth. Jenny became involved in literally everything going and even worked as a volunteer at 6 Hosp revising their

filing system. She knew Matron Wg Off Bone very well and most of the nursing sisters from her WRAAF days. Life couldn't have been much better.

Air Cdre Rowell DCE wrote to me in Butterworth asking if I would like to return to Canberra after my tour expired. As we owned our own home in Canberra, I readily agreed and proceeded to kit out for the cold. Typical air force, my posting came out for Wallgrove as WORNCC NSW! Reg Rowell apologised but said DPA needed my services more urgently in NSW. We sold our house and stowed my winter woolies. Jenny returned to the public service with the ATO at Parramatta.

Why does De-Fence mean the exact opposite to Defence?

In 1981, I flew to Townsville and Cairns on resettlement and purchased a home at Mt Louisa, Townsville. In March 1982, I elected discharge in sunny Townsville where we still reside to this day. Jenny transferred to the ATO office in Townsville while yours truly bumbled around trying to find his civvy feet. After a break of 6 months, I purchased a bulk mailbag contract which took up a maximum of two hours in the mornings so I also joined the RAAF AR where I worked four half days per week on special projects – usually in Ground Radio. I eventually sold the mail contract to ex WOff Ken Raynor (Radtechg) and I joined the tax office as an auditor. My mate and I (as a team) used to go away for two week itineraries and the first things we packed were our golf clubs. By this time, I had some 6 rental properties around Townsville and was also into Ostrich Farming in a big way – later to become big losses which cost me two houses.



Ernie with two of his ostriches.

(Before the industry collapsed, we had over 100 of these beasts – Two breeders (Zimbabwe Blues) were even flown in from Canada at a cost of \$140,000!)

In 1995, I took a 'Separation Package' from the ATO (Jenny had retired 12 months earlier and was enjoying her golf while I was working!). We applied for and got a job as on-site managers of the Dunoon Resort on Magnetic Island. We stayed for 18 months and then applied for a job with the Army NQld Holiday Resorts relief managing their caravan park at Shute Harbour, holiday units at Alma Den on Magnetic Island and Trinity Beach north of Cairns. This took up some 20 weeks per year. We did this for nearly 3 years and met some lovely people but working for the Army was not our cup of tea.

We are now fully retired and VERY busy! Jenny is on and off committees all the time (more on than off), I am the Liaison Officer for the Association of Residents of Queensland Retirement Villages (ARQRV) for our retirement resort, and we are volunteers with Camp Quality.

We still enjoy good health and, on the odd occasion, our golf.

A group of old farts! This photo was taken in Townsville with Magnetic Is in the background in Sep 96 not long before Blue and Harry both died.



L-R: Ex WOff's Blue Barry, Harry Moxon (seated), Mick Cook, Johnny Renfrew, Kevin Hinch, Buck Buchanan

In winter why do we try to keep the house as warm as it was in summer,
while in summer we complained about the heat?