

Neville John Walker 08 July 1933 - 01 January 2017

TAA Service 03 January 1950 22 May 1993

My name is David Reece & like Neville I was a TAA apprentice, however I started 16 years behind Neville in 1966. There are many former TAA apprentices here today, from 1950. 1952, 1955 & beyond.

Sandra asked me if I could offer an insight into Neville's life, "Before Sandra" it's been a little difficult, however with a little research I've uncovered a loveable, affable young man who enjoyed life to the utmost.

We know Neville was an Eastern Suburbs boy from Bondi & spent his youth there, the days of double decker buses & trams along with a little mischief I would imagine.

Neville attended Randwick Boys High School, a selective high school in 1947/48/49, where he attained his Intermediate Certificate, before joining TAA in January 1950. At Randwick BHS, Neville met with another to be TAA apprentice Neville Burton who started with Nifty in 1950.

Whilst at RBHS Neville achieved more than his scholastic achievements, he excelled on the running track, beating a future olympian & on the football field playing Rugby Union.

On Tuesday 3rd January 1950 Neville commenced his apprenticeship at TAA, at Mascot airport, the Sydney based apprentices were taken to support not only TAA but British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines or BCPA, was an airline registered in New South Wales, headquarters in Sydney. It was formed by the governments of Australia (50%), New Zealand (30%) and the United Kingdom (20%) to pursue trans-Pacific flights.

Neville continued playing Rugby during his apprenticeship in Eastern Suburbs competitions, he commented he made more money playing football than his apprentice wage. During his rugby playing days he met Jack Gibson who went on to become one of the great Rugby League coaches, however in the early 50's Jack played for a social side in the Eastern Suburbs A-grade competition called Taylor's Celebrity Club. Jack worked as a bouncer for Joe Taylor at the sly drinking and gambling outlet Thommo's Two-Up School as well as other Sydney nightclubs that Taylor owned. I feel sure this is where young Neville became "NIFTY" and "Street Wise" as Neville would occasionally say "Just Don't Get Caught"

It was during his apprenticeship Neville met his lifelong friend, Keith Brown a 1952 apprentice, "Little Brother" working and socialising together. On course in Melbourne in 1960 they stayed at the Waterloo Cup hotel in Ascot Vale & with 6 o'clock closing a beer wasn't easily had, however a "Cubby House" under the stairs with a tap to the cellar provided enough refreshment to quench their thirst throughout each evening.

In 1967 Keith moved to Hong Kong which proved a very popular destination for Neville to conquer, I'm sure it wouldn't have taken Neville to very long to flush out the most desirable drinking & eating establishments there, "Favourites the Taylor" for a shirt or a beer & buying diamonds I'm told.

During his apprenticeship Neville & other apprentices from his year had to do National Service, however being in the aircraft industry they were sent to the RAAF base at Richmond where they fought the "Battle of Richmond" I'm sure for Neville more adventures & tricks to be learnt, including swimming the Nepean river to pilfer water melons from a neighbouring farm, never ever let an opportunity pass you by!

Doug Buchanan, from the 1952 Apprentice Intake writes:

Neville was my introduction to Pratt & Whitney R2800 engines as fitted to the Douglas DC-6 aircraft, he was the first person I worked with at TAA. Being my first day on the engine stand and he having two years

start on me, he was able to show me how to do the oily jobs and everything to get my new overalls christened. However I was able to survive his guidance and we became firm friends.

Days off spent in the city were most enjoyable with the odd beer at Uncle Jack's, the Marble Bar and a game of snooker at Violet Lindrum's establishment in Pitt Street.

Because of my absence from Sydney in years to follow I didn't see a lot of Neville unless visiting on holidays when Jan and I were treated like Royalty at his home in Rockdale and my passing through Mascot whilst working.

I never saw Neville lose his cool, being stuck for words, he was always good for a laugh and a joke, and was good company.

He will be sadly missed by all those who knew him.

Doug and Jan Buchanan.

During the years at TAA Neville would have seen a multitude of changes, when he arrived in 1950 TAA would have operated DC-3, DC-4, Convair 240's along with the DC-6 operated by BCPA. In 1954 the Vickers Viscount arrived, the first turbine engine powered aircraft, TAA was the first operator outside of Europe to operate the Viscount. In 1959 the Lockheed Electra, (I was often told of the unreliable Electra, it built my house!) & the Fokker Friendship arrived, it was only another 5 years, 1964 when the Boeing 727 arrived, the first domestic pure jet aircraft closely followed by the Douglas DC-9. These aircraft were far more reliable than the labour intensive aircraft which were in service when Neville first started. The Airbus A300 & Boeing 737 were introduced in the 1980's, TAA was corporatised in 1986 & became Australian Airlines, however it was business as usual in the engineering department.

Neville spent approximately 10 working at the International Terminal in Sydney providing engineering support for the Italian airline Alitalia, along with Neville Cutler, "The 2 Neville's" I think their "Modus Operandi" was "To Ride Middle of the Pack, Keep Low in the Saddle" nobody really knew what they really did & they liked it that way, however their temperament suited the job & they became good friends which continued on into their retirements.

Neville really enjoyed the social life, he organised reunions with his early apprenticeship colleagues, lunches out in the city with a variety of work colleagues over the years, occasionally over the years Neville would drive 1 of our beloved cockpit cleaners Oliver Nemez to Cobbity Wines for some supplies, stopping at the Marconi Club on the way home to pickup the Italian newspapers.

I don't know if many of you knew of Neville's generosity with his time, I certainly didn't, we all can learn from Neville's good deeds & generosity.

Neville took redundancy from the airline at the time of merger with Qantas in May 1993 having completed over 43 years of service.

Today we farewell Neville, a unique character, a fabulous friend & colleague to many, and an inspiration to all. " R.I.P. Nifty" we'll miss you!