

CHAPTER 1

THE AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC DIVISION (MACQUARIE ISLAND STATION 1978/'79 - 15 MONTHS)

Darwin Coastal Radio Station. (Overseas Telecommunications Commission – Australia.).

Who would ever believe that life would change so dramatically by happening upon a newspaper advertisement?

I had just completed a stint in Darwin, post Cyclone Tracy (Christmas of 1974) which had destroyed the city where I was maintaining on my own the Darwin Coastal Radio Station (OTC Aust.). Prior to this, I had almost completed my cadetship with The Overseas Telecommunications Commission in Brisbane when I was transferred to Sydney in 1975 to complete my final year. I heard that the Radio Technical Officer Gd. 2 in charge of maintaining the Darwin Coastal Radio Station, wanted to leave the station after having lost his house previously in the cyclone. I approached the Chief Engineer in head office in Martin Place, Sydney for a possible transfer to Darwin, to maintain this station single-handed, even though I wasn't quite out of my training. The Chief Engineer agreed after the interview. I stayed in this position at Darwin CRS for 18 months, gaining valuable experience in the radio field. Later this was to be important for my future career path. Many of my fellow students later went on to the IT field earning better wages. I preferred to remain in the electronics and communications field which is what I found exciting and an essential service.



Courtesy of blogspot.com (Effects of Cyclone Tracy, Christmas 1974)

Always with a sense of spirit of adventure, I left Darwin on my motor bike to return to Sydney, 3,200km. On the way, I arrived in Cairns for the night after riding through mostly rain as this was the wet season for the northern part of Australia. The next morning while drying off my clothes and camping equipment, I bought a local Cairns newspaper. I read that the Australian Antarctic Division (Department of science), was asking for Radio Operators to join the expeditions to Antarctica and Macquarie Island. There were four Science Research Stations under the control of the Division (Macquarie Island, Casey, Mawson, and Davis Stations), and the expeditioners were then to be part of the Australian National Antarctic Expedition (ANARE). With great excitement and a sense of adventure sharpened by my extended motor bike ride, I sealed the envelope that would soon determine my future one way or another. I sent off the letter to the Antarctic Division (Melbourne), asking to be considered for a position as a Radio Operator, of which I knew they'd decline, as I was technical. So, it was just a joke into the exciting dream of an adventurer. The problem was my application was taken seriously. It was no longer a joke. I was going from literally one extreme to another, at least climate-wise, from tropical Darwin to sub-zero freezing temperatures.

I arrived in Sydney, after a brief stay with my family in Brisbane, where I received a phone call from the Antarctic Division, to fly down to Melbourne Antarctic Division asap, as there was a position for an experienced Radio Technical Officer to be the RADIO OIC of Macquarie Island, complete with two Radio Operators and the Radio Station itself. Macquarie is a Sub Antarctic Science Research Station below Hobart and halfway down to the Antarctic Continent. And in the Convergence zone of the South Pacific Ocean and the Southern Ocean. The environment was to be cold and very wet, due to the 315 days of about 980mm of precipitation that it is subjected to, and almost constant, unending high winds, the 'furious 50s' as it was referred to. I had no idea as to what I was getting myself into and decided to be adventurous and go along with the flow. I was a little disappointed with not going down to the Antarctic Continent, but as I knew nothing about either, I was off to Macquarie Island anyway. I did manage to do some basic survival training in the Snowy mountains, mandatory medical checks, and tests by a psychiatrist to see why I wanted to go and that I would get on well with other expeditioners. Curiosity is one of my strongest traits, and this was an opportunity to find out what it was like to winter with just 19 other expeditioners and discover new territory outside of Australia and discover new personal dimensions. There was little time at the Division in Melbourne for training, before embarking on the *Nella Dan*, a Danish ice breaker ship. As I had the technical knowledge required from my experience in Darwin Coastal Radio Station, I was very suited for Macquarie communications centre, being similar in a technical sense. The Darwin Coastal Radio Station was close to the Darwin City coastline, which experienced salt air corrosion from the ocean salt breezes to the radio antennas, masts, and radio equipment inside the station. So was Macquarie Island radio station! It was going to be very much a challenge in maintaining this station, which was to be the equivalent to the adventure that I was on.