

Quietly spoken, somewhat laconic, Peter Hagan does not readily speak of past glories, but if you Google, he's excelled at practically everything. Major titles in the Northern Territory included Director of Public Works, Director of Roads, Director of Transport Planning and finally Assistant Secretary. He was also President of his Apex Club and the Darwin Veteran Golfer Club and Treasurer of the Arafura Bridge Club, Deputy Chair of the Northern Territory Road Safety Council and a member of the Civil Engineering Advisory Committee to Darwin University and he's a Fellow of Engineers Australia.

On a more frivolous note Google insists Peter even had a stint as Vice Chairman of the Northern Territory Cat Association. That appointment we must blame on wife of 52 years Rose, who was apt to breed Tonkinese and Burmese champions at the drop of a hat. Nowadays there's not a cat in sight, as the pair gaze out over their tranquil Tewartin waterfront. But Peter has been there, done that, in every possible way as an outstanding civil engineer, helping to pull Darwin out of the mayhem of Cyclone Tracy, working to develop roads and townships in much of the Northern Territory over several decades.



A boyhood in Brisbane's Auchenflower was fairly uneventful. Then with a Commonwealth Scholarship to University under his arm Peter chose Civil Engineering. Although he confesses lunchtime games of Bridge were so fascinating sometimes lectures were skipped, the Commonwealth tracked him down as an outstanding student, paid him a cadetship salary while studying and signed him up for the first four years of his adult career. The choice was Canberra (brrr), Papua New-Guinea or Darwin, where he had already spent several Uni vacations working for the Government. Darwin won, not for four years but nearly 50.

In the early bachelor years the place was rather like a frontier town, a transient population, many escaping the law and cold realities like child maintenance, many on two-year contracts from the big smoke. There was a lot of drinking and sport (football for our Pete), a strong military presence and projects out in remote places like the Gove Peninsula. There his Commonwealth Department of Works team was building a tracking station for the Blue Streak Rockets from Woomera. Out in the middle of nowhere, the site is now the town of Nhulunbu. In those days a DC3 would arrive once a fortnight with supplies, most of the workforce in tents, a generator for power and troops sent out to fish and hunt buffalo to supplement rations.

Building 'Beef Roads' was another big programme, to help the cattle industry access the Katherine abattoir. One of those Hagan projects is now the Victoria Highway. By then Peter was married, with a home in Darwin. He would wave Rose goodbye on Mondays and return every fortnight for a weekend at home, flying to Katherine before driving an-

other six hours to the job. And that's where Peter was when Neil Armstrong transfixed the world with a giant leap for mankind.

He was still with the Commonwealth late one December, attending mandatory Christmas Eve parties, returning home at 8 pm to Rose and their two tiny girls when it became rather windy. When the steel (protection against termites) power poles started bending, they thought it was time for the bath. Peter clambered in at one end of the old cast iron tub, Rose the other and the 10 month old and two year old were popped on top. A bit later on the plaster ceiling joined them in the tub too. Peter was irritated his portable radio could not find the usual station before he realised there were no stations at all. When the noise abated they braved it to look outside the bathroom. Of their family home one kitchen wall remained.

A neighbour's house was not too badly damaged so everyone gathered there, stepping gingerly over cables. Their tiny daughters had no shoes, no nappies. When Rose was evacuated to Brisbane they still had no shoes and also there was no money. These were the days before credit cards: you had cash or a cheque book. Problem was, the banks had all been obliterated, along with their cash and their records.



Disaster planning was in existence, but plans had been based on the assumption one strip of Darwin would be damaged, the remainder able to provide support. Tracy was thorough, wiping out the entire area. Free meals were provided at a couple of surviving hotels and a chuck wagon toured feeding work gangs, with people dossing down in swags wherever they could. A free supermarket opened at the high school. Halfway up the promotional ladder by then, Peter's responsibility was water and sewerage. Major General Alan Stretton was appointed to coordinate recovery, in Peter's book he made just one bad mistake. Stretton declared there would be no New Year's Eve celebration, but the tough Territorians just ignored him and the ice works helped keep the booze cold. Recovery was achieved remarkably quickly, with a superb response from other States sending up trucks of materials, men and supplies.

Back on the home front, their car had been sheltering under the house. We must digress a little : As a bachelor Peter bought a very sporty little Honda S 800, red of course as they go faster, and later the very blonde Rose would drive it to high school where she taught. While Pete was working in the bush someone told him they had a new car. Without consultation, Rose had decided on a Ford Falcon, and in early December 1974 they had its duco transformed to a beautiful green. Post-Tracy it was a beautiful green with a lot of big dents. The insurance company called it a write-off, so they bought the wreck back for \$400, found a pot of grey primer and painted all the dents. Thereafter the unfortunate vehicle was called 'Measles'. (On the topic of automobiles, we must include the tale about the Hagans driving out of their place one day to be greeted by lots of people waving at them. It was all very pleasant but unusual, and then they found one of Rose's favourite cats, hanging grimly onto the roof of the car.)

The family expanded with the arrival of a son and in 1978 Peter joined NT Transport Works. One of his more challenging roles was in representing the NT at various national forums, putting forward the Territory position on the variety of issues reflecting the region's remoteness — often overlooked by city bureaucrats.

He was involved in building the town of Jabiru in Kakadu National Park to service the uranium industry and was on the Town Development Authority for several years. He was President of the Engineers Australia Northern Division and as the Judge for Engineering Excellence Awards for the NT travelled across the Territory for a number of years, visiting projects aimed at improving life for remote residents. These included a trip to Groote Island to inspect solar power being developed for small indigenous communities.



Wearing one of his many senior hats one day Pete took the Minister to look around roads in the Kakadu area. Unfortunately they also spent time looking around in the middle of a creek crossing. By the next day someone had arranged a sign 'Hagan's Hole', the photograph of which the Minister had on his wall until he left Parliament. Its caption read :



... and all that remains is a simple sign,
that serves to remind me of the time,
to the depths I plunged with thoughts not sinister,
that day I tried - to drown the Minister.

*and all that remains is a simple sign,
that serves to remind me of the time,
to the depths I plunged with thoughts not sinister,
that day I tried to drown The Minister.*

Along with Bridge (at the Darwin and Arafura Clubs), and lots of international travel, golf was a great interest. Although retiring in 2000, it took until 2012 before they finally chose Noosa and their blissful riverside retreat at Tewantin. Family history is now a passion. Pete cannot find any convicts, but great-great-grandfather John Hagan was a British soldier who brought his family, along with 200 convicts, to Australia in 1845. Nearly 200 years later, the people of the Northern Territory have much to thank him for.

by Susie Osmaston