

## Robert Charles MACKAY



**MACKAY Robert Charles 7777 (1960–67)**  
Father RC MacKay RAAF Officer Guardian  
FH Officer \* Grazier Mungindi; Prep, OGH,  
HC. Mac, Bro, Wad, Sm. Hm. CUO. Potter and  
Education Officer. 1999 Jail Manager Long Bay  
Jail. [13]

Born        5 May 1949                    Sydney, NSW  
Died        12 October 2021                Denpasar, Bali

Charlie Mackay was born on 5 May 1949 some six months after the death of his father, Robert Mackay, an experienced and decorated RAAF officer and grazier who was killed in an air accident in late 1948 while practising aerobatics with a RAAF subordinate. Charlie spent the first 10 years of his life living happily with his mother Florence (Folly) and sister Alison (Ali) at St Ives - attending St Ives Primary School. Florence was the sister of Frank Officer who was to become guardian for both Charlie and Ali when their mother died in 1959. So Charlie and Ali were brought up by Phyllis and Frank Officer on their property, 'Werrina', between Boomi and Mungindi. Frank was an Old Boy of The King's School and that is probably why Charlie landed at the Prep in 1960.

### Prep Monitors, 1961

L to R:     Charlie Mackay, Rick Johnson, Peter  
              Hacon, Peter Ashton, Peter  
              Waterhouse  
Front:      Rev JA Price (master-in-charge)



Charlie probably holds the record as the pupil who was in the most number of houses at The King's School. He started at the Prep in 1960, moved to Old Government House, Macarthur then Broughton, ending up as a monitor in Waddy in 1967, at this stage a large junior boarding house located in the former Forrest House at the old school. By 1967 Charlie was a free and independent spirit and when his uniform trousers were occasionally to be found hanging on the back of the study door, (his study was in the old school tuck shop), you would know that he had taken himself off, by himself, to the Woolpack for a pre-prandial pick-me-up.

Charlie had a solid school career. He was a School Monitor and CUO. He was a good sportsman, a cricketer and fine rugby player and in 1966 a note in the School Magazine on a First XV game against Shore reported that, 'In the backline we had lost Pigott and Fisher, but Mackay as the new outside centre handled the situation well.' Unfortunately, a badly treated corked thigh, suffered in a match against the school Old Boys Rugby team in 1966, meant an end to rugby for the time being with Charlie having to wear a full length calliper on his leg for most of his last year at school.

In 1968, Charlie joined 14 of his school contemporaries at the University of New England, many of whom ended up with him studying Agricultural Economics and living in Earle Page College. Having recovered from his injury, Charlie once again took up rugby. He was a regular player in the famous Page Invitation Social Team. PIST was an exponent of the art of coarse rugby; team warm-up, for example, was undertaken by lying out in the sun on Saturday morning.

There are many things of relevance at this time. Charlie took flying lessons, maybe with his father in mind, which earned him for a time the nickname 'Flaps'. The period also saw a developing interest in travel. In 1969, Dave Fisher and Charlie headed to a cattle ranch in Canada in mid-winter and then on to various places in the USA. Also in 1969 Charlie and

Andrew Joseph, with two Mary White College girls, hitch-hiked to Cairns where he arranged for the group to get a lift on a freight aircraft to Port Moresby. The girls got jobs in Port Moresby but the boys went their separate ways. Ali recalls Charlie telling her stories of him later hitching through Indonesia by himself.

Charlie as a Sgt in the Honour Guard at Victoria Barracks, 1966

Charlie, in his school and most of his university years, was very much a Boomi boy. The stories of his 21st birthday party at the Officer's property 'Werrina' at Boomi provide a backdrop to this description where Charlie was accompanied by a group of his university colleagues. It was a great night, a friendly local crowd, generous hospitality and fine speeches. There was much festivity and the students were particularly taken with the repeats of the local popular song 'The Boomi Boys', to the tune of the 'Old Grey Mare' with 'the Boomi Boys are off (or back) on the piss again...Oh the Boomi Boys' being the only lyrics.

A substantial change in direction occurred in 1971, his final year at UNE. Charlie had to stay on for a period to complete his degree. About this time he married Annie Rogers, whom he had been going out with for some time. With time on his hands Charlie took up potting with Annie in what eventually became a serious pastime – 'besotted with pottery' according to one description. Annie and Charlie moved into a cottage 'Byamee' in the rural outskirts of Uralla where the sheds and outbuildings provided the site for their pottery activities. In time Charlie was supplying his pottery to a number of Sydney restaurants, as well as exhibiting and teaching ceramics. A fellow potter who remembers exhibiting with Charlie at the Old Lodge Gallery, Gladstone, NSW in the mid-1970s described Charlie's work as 'decorated functional ware which was quite contemporary in character'.

In the mid-'80s, Annie and Charlie separated. Annie and his sister Ali however remained close friends until Annie died at Uralla in January 2010.

Charlie got to know some Nicaraguan refugees in Armidale and in 1984, he with friend Terrence Purss set off to help out with the coffee harvest there, in support of the Sandinista government. He probably found that the coffee harvest was the easiest part of his travels because he ended up amongst the confusion of Sandinistas and Contras. It is a pointer however to an emerging concern for the underdog and a desire to help those left behind by society and, why later, he undertook further study in education and joined the NSW Corrections Service.

Back in Australia he married again to Helen which lasted for about 15 years. Some of this time was in Bali.

Charlie's 23-year career with the NSW Corrections Service commenced in 1987. He started as an Education Officer at Parklea in Sydney then moved to Long Bay Correctional Centre dealing with vocational training, becoming Programs Manager in 1993. In 1999 Charlie was Manager of Offender Services and Programs at Long Bay Hospital, receiving a Commissioner's Commendation in 2009 for his tireless work in the area. Awards also included the Meritorious Service Medal and the 15-Year Service Medal. 2000 saw a move to the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre and Charlie retired from the Service in 2010 as Regional Manager of Operations after a distinguished career.

Charlie was a valued and admired member of the Correctional Service and is remembered with much affection by his colleagues. Deputy Commissioner Luke Grant's comment is pertinent:

'Charlie pushed back against conformity and illogical rules, he valued individualism but also paid attention to the pursuit of the common good. This made him a fairly unique person in our highly regimented and increasingly manualised and standardised prison world and despite his healthy lack of respect for authority he was able to build and maintain relations that crossed the line between custodial and non-custodial staff.'

He married Helen in about 1995 and together they invested in Bali. They divorced in 2010.

Charlie moved to Bali permanently in about 2011 where he remained, building several houses and gardening. Ali tells of his single-minded determination to grow a decent tomato in Bali, his enthusiasm for worm farming and marketing sugar cane juice. He was happy there and welcomed visitors; he said to Jeff Thatcher in 2017, 'I live in a village that maintains its Hindu religious practices while at the same time engaging in the modern world ... others might find this as interesting as I do.'



Ali kept in touch and visited Charlie from time to time. In recent years his health deteriorated. A work colleague, Jo Wodak, who visited him in Bali said,

'He had been bedbound for many months with an undiagnosed illness whose main symptom was loss of movement in his legs, looked after by his adopted Balinese family, but he firmly resisted any suggestion to go into hospital for tests. His attitude throughout seemed fatalistic.'

Ali mentions a particular carer in his last months, Komang, whom Charlie had been mentoring for some years.

Charlie in the Balinese compound where he lived  
(supplied by himself in 2017)

Charlie died in Denpasar Hospital, Bali on 12 October 2021 and his funeral was held there. He is survived by his sister, Ali Mackay, her three children and four grandchildren.

Charlie Mackay was very self-contained character, clearly adventurous, sometimes irascible, with an ability to be both fiercely independent on the one hand, but a good team man when that was called for. His changes in occupation were surprising (what cannot be done with a degree in Agricultural Economics?) but whatever he undertook he did well and with the best of his ability. Although he never knew his father, with his changes in direction and his determined attitude, Alison said, 'Charlie was very much like his father' and Jeff Thatcher recalled that at the Prep, Charlie had a leather writing case with his father's name on it, of which he was very proud.



#### Contributors:

Charles Willcocks, Ali Mackay, Jeff Thatcher, Mike Rose, Mac Gudgeon, Richard Kirkby, David Fisher, David Payne, Rodney Hammett.

**Note:** Details of the Mackay and Officer families' backgrounds and interrelationships provided by Rodney Hammett which have interesting connections with The King's School are in an attachment. Charlie remembered his connections to Gowan Brae as his grandparents on his mother's side had owned 'The Cedars' which later became the King's Prep headmaster's house. Charlie was able to tell this story when having tennis lessons on the Cedars' tennis court during his Prep years.



2<sup>nd</sup> XV 1966