

Oral History Interview
Gary Barker with Colin Lancaster
Memories of Athol Charles Summers
Circa 2019

Athol Summers came to King Island from Tasmania in 1938 and was employed by the Tasmanian Forest Commission. They were removing all the old stumps as part of the plan to establish a plantation opposite our farm; *Hillwood*. At that time there were three men. I'm not sure who was in charge, but they all lived in a hut in from Pegarah Road. As we were the nearest neighbours the men used to come over to get milk and provisions. Our home was the central place for the district for quite a few of the folk around. We had a post bag and people would come and collect their mail along with meat, bread and groceries which was left there for them.

We had a tennis court and I do remember Athol and my sister Betty (Elizabeth) playing tennis. He also would come over in the evenings and spend time with our family. After a while, I had a suspicion that Athol and Betty liked each other. As far as my parents went with Athol, I think they thought he was alright. Soon after war was declared, Athol enlisted and did his training down near Hobart. Athol's parents came from Longford, Tasmania, his father was a policeman, and this is where they were married in 1942. I didn't attend their wedding, but I think my mother did. Soon after they were married, they moved to Melbourne and I'm pretty sure this is where Betty remained for the duration of the war.

Athol was one of the Rats of Tobruk and later served in New Guinea. I had no contact with Athol while he was in the Army but Betty in her weekly letters home and kept in touch with the Lancaster's on King Island.

After Athol was discharged in 1947, he must have been interested in obtaining a Soldier Settlers farm. They both returned to King island in the late 1940's with their first child, Judy, who was born in 1946, and lived at *Hillwood* with us. After Athol returned here, I didn't notice that much change in him, though he did suffer from bouts of malaria. He was a jovial man, sincere, hardworking, and reliable. As a brother in law and as a husband he cared for his family, and made the grade with me.

The ex-army fellows who didn't have farming experience had to spend two years doing practical farm work. So, Athol worked under my father Gold, as his plan was to establish a dairy farm. I was working on the farm at the same time and got on well with him and I'm pretty sure he got on alright with my father. He was quite a good worker noting that he didn't have any prior farming experience. For the two years he was working on *Hillwood*, I can't remember the pay arrangements or whether we were subsidised by the Government. I don't know, but I would think he was paid something. When he was allocated a farm (Lot 2C) on Pegarah Road to the west of *Hillwood*, from memory my father and I helped him to establish it.

Athol had also worked for the Settlement Scheme at Mt Stanley, after he completed his farm training with us. He was the time keeper for the men working there, and he and Betty lived at the camp. They stayed there until the house was built on the farm at Pegarah. Athol dairy farmed for quite a number of years, changed to beef

production, then went to work at the Rutile Mine at Naracoopa. As far as his farm went, he used what he was allocated and didn't purchase extra land. They both retired to Currie, and Athol became a volunteer with the ambulance service in Currie. Athol died in 1988 from a heart attack and Betty died 10 years later. Athol was making a cage for the chickens for one of his grand daughters and just suddenly expired.