

# BALANCE

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## Legal Eagle Keeps NT Skies Safe

*Ron Lawford is one of many local practitioners whose legal skills are complementary to their other interests and abilities. Balance hopes to run a series of profiles which will serve to reveal the wealth of talent and skill amongst members of the Law Society.*

When it was suggested to Ron that he provide a member's profile for *Balance*, he wondered what interest it would have to other lawyers. As he is reasonably representative of a large number of mature age people who have recently joined the profession in the NT, thanks to the formation of the NTU Law School in 1987, his profile probably mirrors their's and may be of interest for that reason.



*Ron Lawford and wife Annabelle*

Ron has been a professional pilot since 1958, and his flying career got underway with a flying scholarship from the Air Training Corps in 1955. After completing teacher training in WA, he taught primary school for 5 months, and was accepted to pilot training with the RAAF. He served eight years as a RAAF pilot (including a year in Darwin in 1961/2, when he was the only pilot the RAAF had west of Townsville and north of Perth. He had a Dakota transport and a single engine Vampire jet to fly, and enjoyed his year here.)

He left the RAAF in 1967, and moved back to Darwin. He had married Annabelle in 1965, and she continued preschool teaching, while he continued flying in general aviation as a charter pilot and flying instructor. Ron had started a Commerce degree with Queensland University while in the RAAF and completed it in 1971, and then tried accounting for a number of years with the Northern Territory Administration.

Cyclone Tracy was a watershed for him. After the cyclone, he left the public service, rebuilt his house, bought a number of other houses and rebuilt them when he was not flying aeroplanes. In 1983 the family decided to build an aeroplane, and for the next three years, that took up most of

their spare time. The aeroplane flew for the first time at the end of 1986.

In about 1985, Ron began planning for 1998 - that being when he turns 60. Having been a professional pilot since 1958, and under the rules applying in 1985, Ron expected to cease commercial flying operations at 60, but had no desire to be compulsorily retired and looked around for an occupation to "keep the rust out of his brain" after he turned 60. Ron was qualified to be a teacher or an accountant and was doing work on developing some property he owned, but none of these appealed to him as a rust preventer. He taught John Nader to fly when he was a Supreme Court judge, and discussion with John led Ron to the law.

Preoccupation with aeroplane building caused him to miss the first year of the NTU Law School in 1987, but he started Law in 1988, completing the degree in 1993. Articles with Dennis Norman & Associates followed in 1994 and he was admitted in April 1995. After a delay of nine months he was employed by Paul Clough & Associates, and took out an unrestricted practising certificate in February this year, planning to practice mainly aviation-related law as a sole practitioner.

As a mature age entrant to the profession, Ron has a number of other interests and activities besides the law. He has a small flying school, and teaches people basic flying skills, including night flying. He also teaches qualified pilots how to fly twin engine aircraft, how to fly in formation, perform aerobatic manoeuvres, and how to fly safely at low level, close to the ground. He carries out flight tests of pilots for the issue of pilot licences as a delegate of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

His two sons are commercial pilots, and Ron comments that he has spent considerable time over the past four years training them for this profession.

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# **P**olicy in Relation to Leave by Articled Clerks

## **Introduction**

This document sets out the policy of the Law Society of the Northern Territory as at January 1997 in relation to leave taken during the period of articles by a person seeking admission as a legal practitioner in the Territory, where that person is not already admitted in another Australian State or Territory.

## **Background**

By Rule 25 of the *Legal Practitioners' Rules*, an applicant for admission as a legal practitioner is required to have served 12 months articles, unless some lesser period is allowed by the Court.

That period of 12 months commences on the date approved by the Legal Practitioner's Admission Board. Purported service as an articled clerk prior to that date does not count.

By sub-rule 11(5), a person who has been an associate to a Judge has the period which that person is required to serve under articles of clerkship reduced by a period equal to one half of the period of service as an associate or by six months, whichever is the lesser. Thus a person who has served as a Judge's associate may, when seeking admission, be relying on practical experience gained over an 18 month period.

## **Entitlement to Leave**

Neither the *Legal Practitioners' Act* nor the *Legal Practitioners' Rules* make any provision for leave at all.

Sub-rule 11(1) stipulates that an applicant for admission must have successfully completed "**not less than one year's** satisfactory service under articles of clerkship ....." (emphasis added).

Sub-rule 11(5) gives an applicant credit for half of the period during which the applicant "has rendered service as an associate ...."

The wording of these two provisions, and the absence of any specific entitlement to leave, suggests that any time taken as leave during the period of

articles (or period of service as an associate) must be made up before the requirement of sub-rule 11(1)(a) is satisfied. This is the position in Victoria.

However the Law Society has noted the memorandum issued by the Secretary of the Legal Practitioner's Admission Board on 13 June 1995, whereby the Board determined that the period of articles may include up to four weeks annual (sic) and seven days sick leave.

## **The Policy**

The policy of the Law Society is that the Society will not object to the proposed admission of a practitioner on the ground that the applicant has failed to complete the necessary period of articles, where:-

- (a) The total period of recreation leave taken by the applicant during the period of articles does not exceed 20 working days OR an amount calculated at the rate of 20 working days per annum, whichever is the lesser;
- (b) The total period of sick leave taken by the applicant during the period of articles does not exceed 5 working days OR an amount calculated at the rate of 5 working days per annum, whichever is the lesser; and
- (c) The total period of recreation leave taken by the applicant during the period of service as an associate does not exceed 20 working days OR an amount calculated at the rate of 20 working days per annum, whichever is the lesser; and
- (c) The total period of sick leave taken by the applicant during the period of service as an associate does not exceed 5 working days OR an amount calculated at the rate of 5 working days per annum, whichever is the lesser.

## **Review of the Policy**

This policy is subject to review by the Law Society. Persons who may be affected by this policy should check with the Executive Officer of the Society.

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He spends some time each week, keeping track of the family investments.

Ron's community service involvement includes being chief flying instructor for the Top End Ultralight Aircraft Club, pilot examiner for the Ultralight Aircraft Association - which means he flight-tests pilots for ultralight aircraft pilot certificates. Following the Seaview crash, the regulations for civil aviation are being completely rewritten, and he takes an active interest in that process.

Ron is also active in the Darwin South Rotary Club, being the Club's community service director in 1997. The Club does a lot of general community service, and this also keeps him busy.

He is convenor of the NT Airspace Advisory Committee - the committee advises the Australian Defence Force, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, and Airservices Australia of the effect on the NT civil aviation industry of proposed airspace changes. The committee deals with anything that affects the NT and northern WA airspace from low level wind shear alert trials at Darwin to aircraft noise over Kakadu National Park and the development of the army's new weapon firing range at Bradshaw near the mouth of the Victoria River. As Convenor, he attends planning conferences for the major defence exercises that are held in the Top End each year, representing the NT civil aviation industry.

For recreation, Ron flies his aeroplane (that's the one that makes a funny noise and appears to fly backwards), usually with Annabelle in the back seat, but he has introduced a lot of Darwin people to the pleasure of small aircraft by taking them up in his aeroplane. He and Annabelle fly their aeroplane down south once or twice each year.

When not occupied with all of the aforementioned activities, Ron exercises by walking at dawn each morning, reading military history and researching his family tree. He and Annabelle enjoy a leisurely meal with a bottle of wine at the Sailing Club most weekends.

Ron plans to continue flying for as long as he remains fit, and plans to practice law as long as he has a working brain that needs anti-rust activity.

