



FOR AUSTRALIAN TROOPS

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# NOT TO BE SHOT AT OR EXPORTED

An Airman's Letters Home 1942-1945

LESLIE HAROLD SULLIVAN



WINNER OF THE 1994 HERITAGE AWARD

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An Airman's Letters Home 1942-1945

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LESLIE HAROLD SULLIVAN

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Royal Australian Air Force Museum

An occasional series Number 7

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*This book is dedicated to my parents  
Harold Macleay Sullivan (1891–1956) and  
Nina Sarah Sullivan (1898–1980).*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Les Sullivan was 18 when, after one week as a primary school teacher, he enlisted in the RAAF as a technical trainee. From 1942–45 he served as a flight rigger and airframe fitter at various training and operational units in Australia.

He was discharged in September 1945 and resumed his teaching career. In 1950 he graduated from University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts Degree after three years as an evening student.

February 1952 saw him back in the RAAF as an Education Officer in which category he served in a wide variety of appointments, including two years on exchange duty with the Royal Air Force.

Les retired from the RAAF in 1974 with the rank of Wing Commander, his last appointment being Staff Officer Ground Training at Headquarters Support Command. From 1974–86 he was an Educational Counsellor at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 1957 he married Joan Symons, a former wartime WAAAF and daughter of Squadron Leader Bill Symons MBE RAAF (1924–50). They have two children, Bill and Faith. With Joan he now lives at Pambula Beach, NSW.

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My wife and family, who on the many occasions when I reminisced, said, "Why don't you write a book?". Well, Joan, Bill and Faith, here it is.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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In my first letter to my parents following my enlistment in the RAAF on 13 October 1942, I asked my mother to keep all my letters in a safe place. She did, and 50 years later I still have every one of them, together with some my parents wrote to me.

When, in November 1980, *The Australian* newspaper invited letters describing a wartime Christmas, I submitted my letter home of 26 December 1942. It described how I spent my first Christmas away from home with the Smith family of Canterbury, Melbourne. *The Australian* published it as the best letter and this led, two months later, to myself and my wife sitting down to dinner with Mrs Smith and her family at the same table in the same room as I had all those years before.

Ten years later *The Australian* repeated the exercise and I submitted a letter describing my last wartime Christmas Day at Cairns, Qld, which also was published. Since then, extracts have been published in other newspapers and magazines.

When Australia Post invited letters which described aspects of the history of Melbourne for a display to mark the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of the city, I submitted extracts describing Melbourne in wartime through the eyes of an 18-year-old from the country. Australia Post, in returning them, wrote:

Thank you for your "Marvellous Melbourne Letters". They have been put to good use at a Psychiatric Hospital trying to jog the memories of the patients. They are a delight to read. Thank you for sharing them with us.

I hope you too enjoy reading them, together with letters from my parents, extracts from my diary and historical sketches of the RAAF stations concerned.

LES SULLIVAN  
Wing Commander RAAF (Retired)  
Pambula Beach NSW, November 1993

## INTRODUCTION

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During World War II hundreds of thousands of Australian servicemen and women wrote millions of letters to their families, loved ones and friends. Some were long and detailed while others, like those from prisoners of war, sent through the Red Cross and received months and even years later, were impersonal lettergrams simply confirming that the writer was still alive at the time of writing.

Censorship restricted what could be written about. So letters wryly told of the humorous side of service life, of mateship and of the inevitable “bullshit” and made light of danger, suffering and imminent death. Letter writing offered an escape from the monotony of service life, which was once aptly described as “months of utter boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror”.

Although, as a member of the RAAF, I had volunteered to serve anywhere in the world, I never heard the proverbial “shot fired in anger”. I was never in a location where I could not go to a dance or a movie if I wanted to. We called ourselves “koalas” as, like that symbol, we felt we were Not to be Shot At or Exported.

So my letters are not about war. Instead, they depict the maturing of a personality under the circumstances of the time; they give vignettes of cities and towns which played host to thousands of men and women thrust into their midst; they describe attitudes to US servicemen “over here, over paid and oversexed” but fighting in the common cause. Finally, they describe the largely unacknowledged contribution of tens of thousands of women and girls who manned the dozens of voluntary organisations which did so much to provide a few home comforts for those in the services.

If nothing else, they describe from a personal viewpoint an era which, in a few more years, will be forgotten, using a medium which is, in this age of electronic communication, rapidly becoming a lost art — the personal hand-written letter.

## CHAPTER ONE

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# *Those magnificent men*

### **My First Flight**

I was eleven when I had my first aeroplane flight but I remember it as if it were only yesterday. It was in Charles Ulm's *Faith in Australia* at Frogmore, a swampy area near the Macleay River, ten kilometres north-east of Kempsey, NSW. As the *Macleay Argus* reported on 30 June 1936:

The newly-formed Kempsey Aero Club held its first aerial pageant yesterday – King's Birthday holiday – at Frogmore. The morning was given over to joy-riding and the old bus, *Faith in Australia*, proved the popular choice. Sixteen planes of various types were on the ground, the large plane owned by Airlines of Australia towering over the smaller types.

Frogmore had been in the news three years earlier when, in June 1933, Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith had made a forced landing there in his famous *Southern Cross* due to bad weather. The next morning he and his crew, which included such famous names as Harry Purvis, Tom Pethybridge and Harold Affleck, found the "old bus" surrounded by rising



The first thrill  
of 1934-





FLY WITH  
**ULM**  
IN THE  
"FAITH IN  
AUSTRALIA"

*See the glorious panorama of your own district from a comfortable lounge chair in this record-breaking air-liner, flown by Flight-Lieut. C. F. Ulm. Each passenger has an individual seat and ample aviation spare. Three engines and two pilots. LEISURE. PERFECT SAFETY.*

**Adults 10/-; Children 5/-.**

Handbill for joy rides in VH-UXX, Faith in Australia. Avro Ten depicted is Southern Sun. VH-UXX was originally Southern Moon.

flood water and the engines soaked by the downpour. They requisitioned a local bullock teamster, Percy Johnson, and the next day it was towed to higher ground near the main road. The *Macleay Argus* reported that: "Sir Charles expressed disappointment that Kempsey did not have an all-weather landing ground."

My first flight was in a similar type of aircraft and one which was almost as famous. *Faith in Australia* had begun its flying career in Australia in Kingsford-Smith's Australian National Airways in 1930 as the *Southern Moon* (VH-UMI) and flew between Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. The airline collapsed due to lack of confidence in air travel following the tragic loss of a sister ship, the *Southern Cloud* (VH-UMF), on 31 March 1931. VH-UMI was acquired by Charles Ulm and rebuilt at Cockatoo Island Dockyard as a long-range aircraft with strengthened airframe, more powerful 330 hp nine-cylinder Wright Whirlwind engines and long-range tanks. It was re-registered VH-UXX, re-named *Faith in Australia* and in October 1933 it set a new England-Australia record by flying from Fairey's aerodrome, where Heathrow now stands, to Derby in Western Australia in 6 days, 17 hours and 45 minutes.

In February 1934, Ulm flew the first airmail flight from New Zealand to Australia in *Faith in Australia* and in April carried the first airmail in the reverse direction. In July that year, Ulm and Scotty Allan flew the first official airmail from Australia to New Guinea, again in VH-UXX. After Ulm died in 1934, little more was heard of *Faith in Australia* until it was purchased by Stephens Aviation for service in New Guinea where, after the Japanese attack, it flew about 110,000 km evacuating refugees from the island. Its last recorded flight was from Port Moresby to Cairns on 16 February 1942. Sadly, after a distinguished and eventful career, it was left to rot at Townsville.

This then was the famous aeroplane in which I made my first flight, and although I had heard of its airmail flights I was not really aware of its history. My intrepid 72-year-old grandmother had decided to make her first flight and had shouted a younger cousin and me the ten shilling (\$1)

joy-ride which lasted an all-too-brief ten minutes. I hoped I would not be airsick, as I had been prone to car-sickness since I was a baby. I need not have worried as there were very few "air-pockets" (as turbulence was then known) in the cool air of a June morning.

We sat two-abreast in cane chairs, five each side of a narrow aisle, and nervously waited for the pilot to take off across the soggy turf. Outside the window where I sat, towards the front, there was a solid-looking undercarriage strut to which was fixed a crude airspeed indicator. It was a simple metal quadrant with numbers from one to one hundred around the circumference. Attached by a pin to the centre was a spring-loaded blade which responded to the air pressure of the slipstream and indicated the airspeed on the quadrant. Soon it was registering 60 miles per hour (100 km per hour) as we flew 1,000 feet (335 metres) above the ground. So this was what it was like to see the ground as a bird saw it!

Excitedly we identified familiar landmarks: Kempsey High School, where I had begun my secondary education a few months earlier, the road and rail bridges over the Macleay River and the cemetery at East Kempsey. Too soon we were bumping across the grass as we taxied in. Elatedly I told my anxious parents that I had not even felt I was going to be sick.

Among the 16 planes referred to in the *Macleay Argus* report was the new Stinson Tri-motor airliner just brought into service on the east coast air routes by Airlines of Australia on 24 April 1936, resplendent in its colourful dark blue and bright orange trim. There was an immaculate Stinson Reliant, owned by the Shell Company and one of the first executive aircraft in Australia. It was a single-engined high wing monoplane with a graceful gull shaped wing supported by struts, the smoothly-cowled radial engine with its bumps over the rocker-box covers giving it a very classy look. There are still two of these distinctively pretty planes flying in Australia. I also remember that there was a twin-engine Monospar, also flown by Airlines of Australia, and two German Klemm sports aircraft, the *Swallow* and the *Eagle*.



The large crowd, most of whom were seeing aircraft at close quarters for the first time in their lives, were thrilled by the aerial acrobatics of the Newcastle Aero Club's Gypsy Moth flown by their Chief Instructor, Jerry Major. Loop-the-loops, stall turns and the falling leaf (spin) were climaxed by a flour bomb attack on a tent, simulating the traditional North-West Frontier attack on a rebel fort. My life-long love affair with aeroplanes had begun.

We did not have to wait long for our next taste of

flying thrills. Kingsford-Smith's criticism of the lack of a proper landing-ground in 1933 had apparently not been forgotten. An aerodrome was built at Aldavilla, five kilometres west of Kempsey, and on 4 December 1937 was officially opened by the Minister for Defence, Mr H.V.C. Thorby, who was also in charge of civil aviation matters. Again the *Macleay Argus* reported the event:

In his address Mr Thorby congratulated Kempsey on achieving such an excellent 'drome which was destined to become one of the most important in the Commonwealth. He then advised that the installation of the Lorenz (radio) beacon would make the 'drome safe by day and night and in all weathers.

This was even more spectacular than the earlier air pageant, as the Royal Australian Air Force was represented by a flight of exciting Hawker Demons and the Minister had arrived and departed in the latest addition to the RAAF front-line strength, an Avro Anson general reconnaissance aircraft. My memories of this pageant were vivid ones of the Hawker Demons screaming overhead, their Rolls Royce Kestrel engines booming majestically and the bracing wires on their wings howling in unison. When the Minister departed in the Avro Anson he sat in the glazed turret on top of the fuselage and as he waved we all frantically waved back. I could not get into the Air Force soon enough, but it was to be five years before this dream came true.

### Growing Up in the 1930s

When I look back over the 20th century I am sure that there was no better time to be a boy than in the 1930s and no better place to grow up than the country, particularly the north coast of New South Wales. The only challenge to this claim might come from those who grew up in the 1960s, the age of space flight and economic prosperity. True, there was the Great Depression and slow recovery from its deprivation, but country folk were largely insulated from

the unemployment, homelessness, near starvation and general hopelessness of that decade.

The 1930s was a golden age of world-girdling, record-breaking flights by men and women who, despite the lack of modern media, were household names: "Smithy", Ulm, Hinkler, Melrose, Broadbent, Jean Batten and in the USA and the UK: Lindbergh, Dolittle, Wiley Post, Amelia Earhart, Amy Johnson, Scott and Campbell-Black and Mollison. In those days when radios were few and two-day old news came by the newspapers, it is a tribute to their power that their names were on everyone's lips and their latest exploits greeted with amazement.

My birth on 29 August 1924 was nicely timed for me to be a spectator of these events and, like many of my generation, it was as easy to become hooked on aeroplanes as the children of today are on computers and video games.

I was the eldest child of Harold Macleay and Nina Sarah Sullivan, who were both descended from Macleay River pioneer families. He was a dairy farmer at Clybucca, 19 kilometres north of Kempsey, where I was born. A fourth generation Australian, his great-grandfather, William, had arrived in Sydney as a soldier to join the NSW Corps in 1808. William Sullivan's second son, also William, born in 1818, married a convict, Mary Ann Jane Forster, in 1843 and, soon after, they moved to the newly-settled Macleay River valley where he was engaged in the cedar trade. My father's mother was a descendant of Cornelius Christian, who arrived from Sussex with his family in 1849 and soon after also moved to the new frontier on the north coast.

My mother's father, Richard Morris, had arrived from Shropshire in 1880 and secured a job at Bathurst, NSW, as groom for Cobb and Co's coach horses. In 1883 he joined the NSW Police Force as a mounted constable and spent most of his career in charge of police stations at the small villages scattered throughout the Lower Macleay Valley where, on his white horse, Peter, he was a well-known figure.

Dad's mother had bought two farms, totalling about 100 acres (40 hectares), on each side of the main road north from Kempsey, on which he and his brother share-farmed in

the 1920s and 1930s. Grandfather was a bankrupt construction foreman and played no part in the financial management of the farms, for obvious reasons. Grandmother Sullivan was an innovator. She had one of the first cars in the district, a T-model Ford, and when milking machines became available she had them installed. This enabled my father and his brother, with the help of their wives and some hired help, to milk a herd of up to 80 Australian Illawarra Shorthorns. This was in contrast to many of the farmers who hand-milked small, poor quality herds and existed at bare subsistence level.

I was followed over the next 13 years by two sisters, Beryl and Mona, and two brothers, John and Alan. With our five cousins over the road we were a large extended family, with grandmother as the matriarch. We shared most things and experiences: work, play, fights, secrets, sometimes meals depending on where we happened to be playing, and occasionally beds when our parents and neighbours got together to play cards or listen to test cricket in England through the static on grandmother's AWA radio, which was one of the first in the area.

Our four-roomed weatherboard house, built by grandfather and his two sons, was very basic. We had none of the amenities taken for granted today. Two tanks and one tap in the kitchen served all purposes, a chip heater provided hot water for our once-a-week baths, a primus cooker supplemented the wood stove for early morning cups of tea before milking began and an earthenware butter cooler and meat-safe on the verandah kept the butter, meat and milk from spoiling too quickly. There was no electricity and at night kerosene lamps were the only source of light for cooking, eating, reading and by which to study or do homework.

One of my jobs each afternoon was to prepare the lamps for the night, filling them with kerosene, cleaning the glass mantles and trimming the wicks. The WC was a 40-foot (13-metre) walk down to the corner of the backyard and another of my jobs each week was to dig a hole in the loamy soil of the orchard where Dad buried the night-soil.



*The Sullivan farmhouse at Clybucca, near Kempsey, in 1940.*

Mum washed in a series of galvanised wash tubs after the clothes had been boiled in the wood-fired copper, for which I had to prepare the fuel. Washing was always done on Monday, the same day as the grocer came from the nearby hamlet of Smithtown to take her order for the week, with delivery on the Tuesday. The butcher called twice weekly, taking orders on the Monday for delivery on the Friday and vice-versa, and the baker called three times a week. Mum helped family finances by selling eggs to the grocer. Fresh fruit was a luxury and only on the table after a monthly drive to Kempsey to shop for other than the basic necessities. We were fortunate that we owned a car and although there was Friday night shopping and there were two picture theatres in Kempsey, such indulgences were never considered. I cried bitterly when I was not allowed to go with my cousins to see the classic aviation film, *Men With Wings*.

Clybucca Public School was a typical one-teacher school and to get to it I had to learn to ride a bike the four kilometres over the narrow, pot-holed, corrugated gravel road when I began school at the age of six. Spills and gravel-rashed knees and elbows did not deter me and I loved school. Several years, despite deluges for which the north coast is known, I did not miss a day's school. In fact, I loved wet days when only a dozen of my 30 or so schoolmates



*Clybucca Public School pupils. Author is back row, third from left.*

turned up and our teacher, John Trainor, would leave us to our own devices. I loved nothing more than to delve into the small library of adventure classics where I got to know James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, Henty's historical novels and, most-loved of all, the exotic adventure novels of R.M. Ballantyne, such as *Coral Island* and *The Gorilla Hunters*.

At times, as I pored over my books, I would hear the mail plane fly over, as we were right on the route they regularly flew, with the railway line to the west, the main road outside and the coast only 15 kilometres to the east, all useful as visual navigation aids. I would try to sneak a look through the window to see if I could identify it and hope that, when we came out for recess or lunch, it would still be in sight. The remarkable thing in those days was that, with still air speeds of only 100 kph, it was possible to keep a plane flying at 5,000 feet (1,500 metres) in sight for up to half an hour, when it would still be only 50 kilometres distant. We would watch the Avro Tens of New England Airways and later the noisy Stinson Tri-motors of Airlines of Australia and the huge, but quieter, Empire Flying Boats of Imperial Airways flown by Qantas, until they were mere

specks fading and reappearing to our straining eyes. Occasionally, when word spread that one of our famous aviators would be flying up the coast from Sydney to Brisbane, at the first sound of an aeroplane engine, Mr Trainor would let us watch it fly over. I saw Smithy's new monoplane, the Lockheed Altair *Lady Southern Cross*, in this way and also Jean Batten in her speedy little Percival Mew Gull.

Several times the Avros made forced landings in a large cattle-fattening paddock only one kilometre from home and as soon as we could we pedalled our bicycles furiously to the site in the hope that we might even see the pilots, whose names were well known to us – Harry Purvis, Keith Virtue or Scotty Allan. Sometimes, if the fault could not be fixed, a smaller plane such as a Puss Moth would be flown up from Sydney with spare parts, so that we would have the bonus of two planes on the ground.

There were reminders from time to time that planes and pilots were not indestructible as news came of a crash, often of a plane we had seen regularly. The mysterious disappearance of the Avro Ten *Southern Cloud* in 1931, the crash of the Stinson in the Macpherson Ranges six years later and the story of its location by bushman Bernard O'Reilly, which was one of the first dramas in which radio brought news updates to the public almost as the drama unfolded, reminded us of the hazards of flying. Finally, the crash of the *Lady Southern Cross* off the coast of Burma in 1934 with our beloved Smithy at the controls proved that even our heroes were not immortal.

The one event that epitomised the spirit of the 1930s was the Mildenhall (England) to Melbourne Centenary Air Race in October 1934. With a first prize of \$20,000 and a total of \$30,000 in prize money, not to mention the prestige involved, this Great Air Race captured the imagination of the world as well as the interest of the great aviation companies and the flying fraternity, who were all brought together in the one event. It is a pity that the recent otherwise excellent television mini-series depicting the Great Air Race failed to capture the excitement and awe with

which we heard the news as Scott and Campbell-Black in the De Havilland Comet shattered the records. I drew a map of the world on which I followed the progress of the competitors as they hopped their way in 23 stages to Australia. I can still recall in sequence most of those stops and the details of the planes and crews, such was the impact of this epic race.

I expressed my love affair with planes in other ways. Even two crossed wooden clothes pegs would do to represent a plane in our play. Later on when I could use tools, I would fashion more realistic models from the sides of packing cases, balance them on the end of a stake so that they were free to turn and fix them to fence posts where the crude propeller thrashed around in the wind. On the rudder I would paint the registration VH-USU, representing the *Southern Cross*. There was something like this on the fence near most boys' homes in those days.

In 1938, when my father began to have the *Sydney Morning Herald* delivered regularly, I began keeping a scrap book which I maintained until the end of World War II. I still have it, with the first clipping being of the maiden flight of the prototype Douglas DC-4 on 7 June 1938. My knowledge of aeroplanes and how they flew got a great boost when, at about this time, the son of a friend of my parents gave me a collection of *Flying Aces*, a US monthly magazine which had stories of the North-West Frontier by Captain Johns of *Biggles* fame, accounts of recent developments in aviation, profiles of the latest aeroplanes, but most exciting of all, plans for the home construction of balsawood flying models. I was now at high school and I saved all my meagre pocket money to buy balsawood, special cement and dope to waterproof the tissue paper-covered wings and fuselage, and rubber for the motive power. My enthusiasm for fragile, built-up flying models came to an abrupt end when my youngest brother, then aged two, got into my room and, in his attempts to make my model fly, reduced it to matchwood. From then on, I stuck to solid models displayed on a model aerodrome, and this won first prize in the Kempsey Show for "Best Model – Any

Kind". By now I had a pretty good understanding of how planes flew and the names of the controls and their purposes – and it was 1939.

[*Macleay Argus*, Centennial Edition, 1885–1985, pp. 64, 65.  
"Wings of Peace", *Aeroplane Monthly*, February 1991, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 115–17.  
Greg Copley, *Australians in the Air*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976.]

## CHAPTER TWO

# *Consequently Australia is also at war*

*(R.G. Menzies PM — 1939)*

### Training to be a Teacher

When World War II began, and with it the gradual but inevitable realisation that life was henceforth never going to be the same, my main concern was that it would last long enough for me to be able to join the Air Force. I was in fourth year at Kempsey High School, which involved riding my bike five kilometres to catch a bus which conveyed me another 15 kilometres to school. I knew that my parents were making sacrifices to enable me to sit for the Leaving Certificate Examination at the end of fifth year, one of which was that my father could no longer afford to buy the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

I had good teachers who fostered my growing interest in English, history, geography and French. I was a dud, however, at mathematics and the sciences which I had dropped after the Intermediate Certificate Examination at the end of third year. I persevered with a form of general mathematics which was necessary for university matriculation, but despite extra coaching from the mathematics teacher, I could never solve equations. I was

encouraged to tackle extra honours work in history and geography, which required me to order special text books from the NSW Public Library. When the results came out in January 1941 I had passed with As in English, history and geography but had failed to reach the honours standard in the last two. I had Bs in French and economics and had passed in mathematics at the "Lower Standard" for matriculation purposes.

Only 15 students sat the Leaving Certificate and three of us were awarded scholarships for our tertiary education, without which none of us could have gone on. I was awarded a Primary Teachers' Training Scholarship to study at Armidale Teachers' College, which gave me an allowance of 8 pounds (\$16) every five weeks. With my mother's advice "not to do anything I'd be ashamed to tell them" ringing in my ears and with tears in my eyes at leaving home for the first time, I boarded the Woodward and Purkiss Company's eight-seater Hudson service car for the dusty, winding, stomach-churning 200 km trip to Armidale. I arrived terribly car-sick and feeling utterly miserable.

I found board with a dear lady, Mrs Doring, at 92 Taylor Street, and after an initial bout of homesickness, settled into my new life as a student teacher with five fellow boarders. Board of 30 shillings (\$3) a week used up most of our meagre allowance. As I was not yet sixteen and a half years old and socially awkward due to my sheltered upbringing, it took me a while to enter into student life, limited as it was. The principal, Mr C.B. Newling, known to all as "Pop" Newling, was a lovable autocrat who kept a very tight rein on his charges. Smoking and drinking were forbidden and to be seen in an hotel meant instant dismissal. He was aware of the temptations of the flesh which young male teachers in isolated one-teacher bush schools might be subjected to. His advice was to spend an hour on the landlady's woodheap, followed by a cold shower.

One by one I watched my fellow students join one of the services as soon as they turned 18, until, by the middle of the second year of our two-year course, there were only three men left out of the initial 40, which, with our 40

female fellow students unaffected, made for an interesting ratio. Every Friday at the college assembly, "Pop" read the names of those serving in the armed forces; he recited Binyon's "Ode to the Fallen", followed by the hymn "I vow to thee my country", when he had to announce that one of his beloved students would not be returning. The lists grew, week by week.

Following the entry of Japan into the war with the attack on Pearl Harbour, the fall of Singapore and landings in New Guinea, the war was suddenly on our doorstep. The desire to be part of it became more urgent. When a flight of the newly established Air Training Corps was formed in Armidale, I was one of the first to enquire about joining, as I thought it would hasten my entry into the RAAF. There was one problem and that was with my parents. My father refused to sign anything committing me to apply for aircrew training, so I had to content myself with preparatory technical training for ground staff. This was a disappointment that haunted me throughout the war years and I rationalised the situation by telling myself that my sensitiveness to motion sickness would make me a liability in any aircrew. As I did not turn 21 until the war ended I did not get an opportunity to flout my father's wishes. Throughout the war, and on many occasions since, I have taken every opportunity to fly, as a passenger, in everything from a Tiger Moth to a Canberra, almost invariably with the same result unless it was a straight and level flight with no turbulence. It has been a fact of my life that I have had to accept.

My interest in planes received another boost when, in June 1942, I went with the Air Training Corps to Bankstown (NSW) Aerodrome which was now a big RAAF and US Army Air Force base. There were Kittyhawks, Airacobras, Douglas Dauntless dive-bombers, Fairey Battles and Vultee Vengeances, all planes that I knew every detail of, and here they were in the flesh for me to climb all over. There was what I was sure was a Spitfire but when I attempted to air my aircraft recognition skills I was told by the NCO that it was a "Capstan", the name of a cigarette

brand which, I read many years later, was the code name given to the Spitfire.

It was when I went home to the farm for the May vacation that I realised how serious the military situation was. A tunnel on the Armidale to Grafton road was mined and the Volunteer Defence Corps was guarding it. In the event of a Japanese landing on the north coast it would be blown up to deny them access to the inland. I caught the train south to Kempsey at Grafton and as we passed along the beaches at Coffs Harbour I saw that the beaches were covered with barbed-wire entanglements and there were foxholes in the sand dunes, manned by the militia. On the other side of the line was the aerodrome from where I saw a Lockheed Hudson bomber take off on submarine patrol, as several ships had been torpedoed just off the coast.

When I arrived home I found that there was to be a meeting of all farmers at which they were to be told by a National Emergency Coordinator what they were to do in the event of a Japanese landing. I went with my father and for the first time in memory many farmers came to a public meeting. They were told that all crops had to be burned or, if green, had to be ploughed in; cars which could not be driven were to be rendered useless; flood boats were to be smashed and, at a given signal, all stock were to be assembled and driven up over the mountains to inland properties. The police would issue special petrol rations over and above the five gallons (21 litres) allowed per month, so that families could be evacuated to the comparative safety of the inland. I could not help wondering if there would be a farm to return to for my next holidays.

### **The Enemy is at Our Very Gates (John Curtin PM — 1942)**

When I returned to Armidale after another sickening trip up "the Big Hill", which the section of 30 miles (50 km) of twisting road above Bellbrook was called, I set about with my fellow boarders building an air-raid shelter in Mrs Doring's backyard. There was an old rainwater tank in the



*Air raid shelter in backyard of 92 Taylor Street, Armidale, NSW, built by student boarders during the "big panic", June 1942.*

yard which we hacked in half vertically to form the roof over a four metre long by one and a half metres deep slit trench. By crouching and huddling over each other's backs we found that we could all just squeeze in to it. Goodness knows why the Japs would want to bomb Armidale, which was known as the city of schools and churches, unless they had heard of our contribution to the war effort at the Teachers' College.

The College made a good target as it stood high on a prominent hill, and we had already dug slit trenches in the pristine gardens. At recess we knitted camouflage nets for the army, using huge wooden needles to knit the coarse twine. In the woodwork room the men had set up a production line supervised by the lecturer, "Wowie" Oxford, to construct models of allied and enemy warplanes to be used by the armed services for training in aircraft recognition. The women students then painted them in

authentic colours and markings. So good was our work that we were entrusted with making a model, to be used for wind tunnel tests, of a secret new twin-engined bomber designed by Sir Lawrence Wackett. This was the Woomera, which failed to reach production when supplies of superior US aircraft became available.

We students were expected and, indeed, wanted to do all we could in support of our mates who had joined up. The women joined the Red Cross or the Women's Voluntary Service organisation (WVS) and the men attended evening lectures on military intelligence, given by a World War I veteran who had joined the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC). As there were only a handful of men students left from the 1941 and 1942 courses, women danced with women at the Saturday night "Dance in the Gym", which was a feature of college social life. When the drummer in the orchestra enlisted I learned to play the drums, trying to master the current hit "In the Mood". But time was running out for me, too.

In early May I went to the National Service Office where, after some uncertainty about my age eligibility, I finally was given an Application for Aircrew form. I filled it in and posted it to father for his consent, as I was under the age of 21. It came back signed, but with "Aircrew" crossed out and "Ground Staff" in its place, with an admonition that on no account was I to apply for aircrew. Disappointed, I returned it to the National Service Office and two weeks later I was called up for a preliminary medical examination. As I wrote in a letter home:

I had my preliminary medical examination today which covered everything except my teeth. I discovered that I am five feet eleven inches high and weigh just under ten stone. I must look a streak! I passed it OK but two doctors had a go with the stethoscope. I think they said I had a slight heart murmur. I hope it does not count against me. Mrs Doring's daughter's husband has been called up from Fossey's and she said he is going down to Sydney to be killed. I told her he had a greater chance of

**APPLICATION FOR**

Candidates who apply for selection as Air Crew may be selected for training as Pilots, Air Observers, and Air Gunners for service in the Royal Australian Air Force at home or abroad. Application form to be completed in candidate's own handwriting. When completed this form should be despatched to

R.A.A.F. Recruiting Centre \_\_\_\_\_

1. Surname SULLIVAN  
(Block Letters)  
2. Christian Names Leslie Harold  
(In full)  
3. Postal Address of Place of Residence 72 Taylor St., Armidale.

4. Name, Relationship, Occupation, and Address of Next-of-Kin Mr H.M. Sullivan, Farmer, Chyluooca, via Kempsey, N.S.W.  
5. Date of Birth 24 August, 1924 6. Married or Single Single  
7. Are you a British Subject? Yes Of pure European descent? Yes  
8. State the Nationality of your Parents. (Nationality at time of death if deceased.)  
Father British Mother British

9.	Name and Address of Schools and Colleges	Period of Education	
		From	To
(a) Give particulars opposite of the schools and colleges at which you were educated from the age of 12.	<u>Kempsey High School, Armidale Teachers College.</u>	<u>1936.</u>	<u>1940.</u>
		<u>1941.</u>	<u>1942.</u>

(b) Have you sat for the Intermediate or Junior Public Examination? If so, give particulars opposite.

Name of examining body N.S.W. Dept. of Education.  
Description of certificate Intermediate Certificate.  
Date of examination \_\_\_\_\_  
Was certificate obtained? Yes  
Subjects passed in English, Maths I, History, Geography, French, Woodwork, Business Principles, Science  
Subjects failed in Maths I.  
Subjects (if any) in which a first-class pass was obtained \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Have you sat for any other educational examination? If so, give particulars opposite.

Name of examining body N.S.W. Dept. of Education.  
Description of examination Leaving Certificate.  
Date of examination \_\_\_\_\_  
Was examination passed? Yes  
Particulars of subjects passed in English A, History A, Geog. A, French B, Economics B, Maths I, 2nd year.  
Entered Armidale Teachers College 19<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1941. Armidale Teachers Training College, Armidale, N.S.W., whole-time tuition.

(d) Give particulars (with dates of further education undertaken since leaving school. Name and address of educational establishment or tutor should be stated, subject taken, and whether whole or part-time tuition.

10. Occupation since leaving school, including nature of work on which now engaged  
Student teacher at Armidale Teachers College.

11. Are you prepared to serve for the duration of the war and for a period of up to 12 months thereafter? Yes

12. Have you had any flying experience? No. If so, number of hours.  
Dual \_\_\_\_\_ Solo \_\_\_\_\_ Name of training organization \_\_\_\_\_

Do you hold a Pilot's Licence? No.

13. Details of any Naval, Military or Air Force Service No previous service

14. Attach particulars of any Experience you have had in the following:—

Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony \_\_\_\_\_  
Engineering (electrical, mechanical, structural, or civil) \_\_\_\_\_  
Internal Combustion Engines \_\_\_\_\_  
Fitting and Turning \_\_\_\_\_

15. Particulars of Sports and Games played Tennis, Cricket, Swimming

16. Have you previously applied for an Appointment in any Branch of the Royal Australian Air Force or Active Citizen Air Force? (If so, give particulars and date.)

NOTE.—An incorrect answer in this question may disqualify a Candidate.

No.

17. Physical particulars: Height 5 feet 11 inches Weight 155 lbs.

Chest Measurement: Normal 34" Expanded 36"

Have you been previously medically examined for Air Force or Civil Flying? No.

18. **CERTIFICATE.**

I hereby certify that the replies set out to the above questions are, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true and correct.

Date 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1942 L. H. Sullivan.  
Signature of Applicant.

19. **CERTIFICATE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN.\***

I am agreeable that my <sup>son</sup> joins the Air Force for <sup>GROUND</sup> duties, for service at home or abroad.

Date 12<sup>th</sup> June 1942 H. M. Sullivan  
Signature of Parent or Guardian.

20. Certificates to be completed by two responsible persons who have known the candidate for a considerable period.

I certify that I have known \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_

(a) \_\_\_\_\_ years. (b) \_\_\_\_\_ years.

and can certify as to his moral courage and suitability for service in the Royal Australian Air Force.

(a) Name \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

being run over in the streets in the blackout than being killed by a Jap bomb.

It was now just a matter of waiting until I turned 18, I thought; however, in early August a disturbing development occurred. We were told by "Pop" Newling that, due to the serious shortage of teachers, he had been asked by the Department of Education whether he thought our course was competent to be sent out teaching a term short of the two-year course. He said he had assured the Department that we were, as we would have completed all our practice teaching requirements by the end of term. It was also rumoured that, due to the number of male teachers who had enlisted, the shortage was so severe that there was talk of making it a reserved occupation, in which case enlistment would be impossible once one began teaching. Meanwhile, I had taken the Oath of Allegiance before the local Voluntary Selection Committee and prayed that the RAAF would get me before the Department of Education.

### My First School

We returned from the September vacation and a week later received our first teaching appointments. My heart sank when I read:

Commence duty without delay as Junior Teacher-in-Charge Tallawudjah Provisional School near Glenreagh. Accommodation is available four miles away in Glenreagh.

"Where the hell is Tallawudjah and what about my call-up?" I asked myself. I was soon to find out. Although I had gone to a one-teacher school and had even done three weeks of practice teaching at my old school at the beginning of the year, I was daunted by the prospect. So, after returning home for a few days to buy clothes appropriate to my new status as a teacher, and in the process using up my entire clothing coupon ration, I caught the North Coast

Mail Train from Kempsey to Glenreagh, which I found was just north of Coffs Harbour. I arranged board with the family who ran the local post office store, assembled my bicycle and, on Monday, 28 September 1942, pedalled it out to Tallawadjah Provisional School. My letter home on the 30th takes up the story:

I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels at present as I have so much to do and organise. Judging by school records and Inspector's reports the previous teacher, Mr Percy, had a good standard which I can't possibly hope to maintain. He was transferred to Newcastle Junior Technical School and can't be called up now. The kids have been without a teacher since he left two months ago. There are nine kids enrolled, from one girl just starting to two girls in sixth class. The School Magazine hasn't arrived yet so I can't give reading and will have to buy text books for the other subjects. I have to make up a daily timetable and work out a programme of lessons in each subject for the next five weeks. At present I am just giving makeshift lessons from what I know and revising what they have learned. In addition I have to prepare a Stock Requisition form for supplies of chalk, pens, pencils, exercise books and so on which won't arrive for weeks. The last few days have been corksers and there are bushfires all around in the hills. The road out from Glenreagh is a bone-breaker with the surface like a corrugated iron roof and dust an inch thick from the timber lorries. Don't bother getting a new tyre for my bike as these are times when you have to make things do and rubber is very scarce.

I am only sticking at it 'til my call-up arrives and every time I look over at the railway station I wonder how long it will be before I am standing on it with my port.

I escaped much sooner than I expected. On the Thursday afternoon on my return to the post office from the school there was a telegram waiting for me. With trembling hands and a pounding heart I opened it to read:

Call-up arrived. Report to Woolloomooloo 13th. Love Dad.

I had been a teacher for just five days. Poor kids! They too were victims of the war and in their isolation deserved a better deal.

The next day I repacked my only partly unpacked port and caught the train back to Kempsey for a final few days with my parents, brothers and sisters. The simple farm chores took on a new and poignant significance as I shared milking with them, and there were many silences when none of us could find words to express what was really in our hearts. A few days later I was on a train again, for Sydney. The first of hundreds of letters I wrote home over the next three years describes that trip:

12 October 1942

I had a good trip down in the train with seven in the compartment so I did not get much sleep. We met three troop trains with flat trucks loaded with Yank lorries, jeeps and tankers with four passenger carriages at the end. They let the coots travel in first class carriages too. A trainee wireless operator/air gunner from the RAAF school at Parkes told me that my first technical course would be in Sydney and then I would probably have to go to Melbourne if I wanted to be a flight rigger. We crossed the Hawkesbury River Bridge at a crawl because of the cracked pylon and in the moonlight I could plainly see the anti-submarine boom net across the river and there were searchlights on each bank sweeping across the water. It was pretty scary. I suppose by this time tomorrow I'll be at the RAAF Recruit Depot at Woolloomooloo and answering to "AC1 Sullivan L.H.". By the way, keep every one of my letters from now in a safe place.

My mother did as I requested and now, some 50 years later, extracts from over 170 letters written over three years, together with 15 letters from my parents, form the basis of this book.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *You'll be sorry!*

#### Letters from No.2 Recruit Depot, Bradfield Park

13 October 1942

Well, here I am lying on my palliasse on the floor of a long hut, using my port as a writing desk. I have a lot to tell you and will try to describe today's events in full. As you know, I stayed at Auntie Lylie's last night and caught a train to St James at 7.15 a.m., and walked to the depot where I joined about 300 who were all waiting. So I joined the mob.

The roll was called and then I had an hour's wait to sign my papers and hand in my civilian identity card and ration book. We had our blood group taken — I am O4. It meant just a prick on the ear lobe but a chap in front of me passed out. Then we had to strip for a brief medical examination, which I am too modest to describe. Finally we took the Oath of Attestation on the Bible, were photographed, completed our pay papers and waited for another roll call. My number is 71221.

At midday about 50 of us boarded a double-decker bus in pouring rain and headed over the bridge for Bradfield

Park Recruit Training Depot. We dived through the rain into a hut and lined up for a lecture by a corporal, who then took us to a store to get our issue of three grey blankets (mine aren't in bad condition) and to fill a palliasse with straw – this is our mattress and it is like a big chaff bag. After returning to our sleeping hut we had tea of bully beef, spuds and soup.

This is a huge camp, between Lindfield and the Lane Cove River, which houses about 3,000 men and 800 WAAAF. It is an Initial Training School, for aircrew mainly, but we have to do a three-week course of drill, fieldcraft and weaponry before posting to a technical course. There are about 30 in this hut and while some have iron stretchers, I am on the floor. Everyone in the hut at the moment is sewing “eagles” on their blue best uniform, using a sewing kit called a “hussuff” (housewife) which was issued with our kit. To get our kit we had to file past a counter and get a hat (fur felt with a band called a puggaree and RAAF badge), a blue work beret and a field service cap and badge for best, two towels, toothbrush, soap, razor, boot brush, clothes brush, braces, two singlets, two underpants, two blue shirts, four collars, a pullover, pair of boots, shoes, overalls (which are called “goonskins”) and finally a blue greatcoat. I have had to take up the legs of the goonskins four inches as they are big to allow for shrinkage.

For dinner today we had pork, cabbage, potatoes and gravy, followed by boiled dried fruits, a biscuit and custard. It is all cooked in big tubs and we eat in the same hut, six to a table. There seem to be dozens of cookhouses around to cater for the thousands.

Everywhere we go, the old hands – those who came in a few days before us! – yell out, “You’ll be sorry!” but it really is a great life even if you are a “rookie”, which is what they call us new recruits, and I wouldn’t be out of it for anything.

16 October 1942

I spoke too soon when I said that the two inoculations were fleabites. I lined up for tea in the queue last night but felt a

bit queer, so I got my head down and another chap brought me back to the hut where, as the doctor had advised, I took an APC and got into bed.

We have just been told that our weekend leave is being cancelled and that we are being posted to the School of Technical Training at Ultimo on Broadway, which is what I wanted. The aircrew trainees here call the ground staff recruits “drongos”, which is supposed to be a bird that can’t fly. They all wear a white flash in the front of their caps, which we say is to let the girls know that they have had VD, so we get our own back.

### From No.3 School of Technical Training, Ultimo

18 October 1942

We are now quartered in the old Institute for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind in City Road, Newtown. I am on the top



*An early photograph of the NSW Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in City Road, Darlington, an inner Sydney suburb. (Courtesy of the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.)*

floor, with about 30 others in a big dormitory, all sleeping on the floor. Lights have to be out at 10.30 p.m. and until then the blackout curtains have to be kept closed, which makes it very stuffy. Facilities and food here are not so good, but it is only a five-minute tram ride to Central Station.

This morning we were marched to the Sydney Technical College at Ultimo, which is where we will do our basic fitting course. This lasts eight weeks, so we should finish about Christmas. There are two shifts worked so that all the lectures can be fitted in. We are on the early one and have to be up at 5.00 a.m. and at the college by 7.00 a.m., and we finish at 3.00 p.m. The late shift starts at 10.30 a.m. and finishes at 8.30 p.m. I have given this in standard time as the RAAF times are based on a 24-hour clock, so that for p.m. you have to add 12 to the time. Thus 8.30 p.m. becomes 2030 hours. It takes some getting used to and you have to keep your wits about you.

We have a closed camp on Mondays and Thursday night, when we are supposed to study and clean our gear, bed space and do any other personal jobs. Leave is until 10.30 p.m. on early shift, and Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. These are not the only barracks for 3 STT as the RAAF has taken over several big hotels at Bondi and Coogee, but just our luck to miss out. There are also some WAAAFs quartered in the Institute but they are strictly "out of bounds" to us.

#### 26 October 1942

I went with another chap into town and saw a good show, *The Fleet's In*, with Dorothy Lamour and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, at the Prince Edward. When we got back we were reprimanded by the guard, who said it makes it hard for others if we come in late.

Everything is done in queues or squads in this racket and you spend a lot of time waiting to be told what to do. We march to the college dressed in our goonskins and have drums to help us keep in step, which usually gets us a bit of an audience. As it's through the back streets of Darlington we see some characters. One frowsy old woman, who had

obviously been on the booze, pushed into our ranks and started to march along with us, until a corporal escorted her back to the footpath, where she hurled some choice language at us, calling us "blue orchid b——s", which is a nickname for the RAAF. We have christened her "Ultimo Aggie".

It's a great life and I wouldn't be out of it for love or money as they are a beaut lot of boys and everyone is your friend. Of course, it's a complete change from civvy life and we complain a lot, but just have to accept as part of the show. Everyone has to take his turn at guard duty and kitchen fatigues etc, and it is easy to get them thrown at you if you don't mind your Ps and Qs. Another regular job is what they call "emu parade", which is when we have to go around the grounds picking up cigarette butts and so on. It is called that because we look like emus fossicking in the dirt. When I am in my uniform I don't really feel any different to being in civvies, and can usually walk through the gates at suburban stations without a ticket, which only costs a penny anyway. I will have a photo taken to show you how much I have changed (for the worse!).

I'll bet the farm looks a picture now after the rain. You had bad luck with the bean prices and I hope the market recovers in time for the next lot.

#### 3 November 1942

We are now on late shift, so night leave won't be much use to us as we finish at 8.00 p.m. On Saturday afternoon I went to the Capitol to see *What's Cookin'*, featuring the Andrew Sisters and the Woody Herman Orchestra, and was it a good show, as Woody is a master clarinetist. Last night I went to Luna Park with cousins Heather and Betty and a cousin of theirs, who is a sergeant in the AIF and talk about a wag! In the river caves a boat got stuck in front of ours and filled with water. Two Yanks and their lady friends were in it and had to clamber on to a ledge until an attendant stopped the show. I was soaked from the knees down, so won't forget my first visit to Luna Park.

We had another inoculation and the smallpox vaccination and I am not feeling too clever. The doctors do both

at the same time, one on each side, and my vacc. is just starting to itch. We were paid on Thursday and I scored £5 and 4 shillings (\$10.40) and will start a bank account when I am more settled.

8 November 1942

I have a big vacc. blister now and the scab is just starting to form and my arm is very sore and itchy. The boys were keeling over like flies on parade this morning, and I just managed to stay on my feet until dismissed and then reported sick with four others from our 567 Flight. The doc took our temperature, gave us aspirin and sent us back to our work benches.

I got my first issue of guard duty on Thursday night, with seven others from my flight, not for any misdemeanour but just in alphabetical turn. We were all mates and worked four three-hour shifts from 5.00 p.m. until 6.00 a.m. One of us had to stay at the gate while the other was a "roving picket". We were given a 0.303 rifle and bayonet, but no bolt or ammo. Just picture me standing at the gate, will you! The corporal had to show me how to hold it and salute an officer with it. I had to stand at ease, with the butt on the ground against my right foot and the rifle at arms length, across the pedestrian gateway.

If an officer goes through you have to come to attention, bringing the rifle vertical along your side. I thought it would be a cow of a job but found it quite interesting. We even slept between shifts on a wire bed, and were able to make tea and toast.

There was a kit inspection yesterday, when we had to lay out our clothing, etc, on the palliasse, with our names showing on all items. The CO who inspected mine said that it looked very nice. He is a very decent old chap with a fatherly look, not like the bouncer at the college.

I saw a newsreel in town on Friday, of Lancasters in a 1,000-bomber raid, also Bostons hedge-hopping across France and Flying Fortresses going out on a raid. I had dinner at the Anzac Buffet Hut in Hyde Park, which is free, and meals aren't too bad.

What do you think of the Second Front news? We seem

to be on the offensive at last, and it's a poor lookout for old Benito Mussolini. I am listening to William Winter's commentary and he is a bit more sarcastic than usual. There is no doubt about the German army's rout in Egypt – it certainly is great news.

13 November 1942

One month today since I joined up. I went to see the WOD (Warrant Officer Disciplinary) yesterday and showed him the letters from the education department. On seeing that I had been a teacher he naturally wanted to know why I wasn't in aircrew. When I told him the reason he said that I could have gone as an Observer, but that of course I would have to respect your wishes. I wish that I was in aircrew as most of the fellows in our flight haven't a very high standard of education. Some have to think how to add two and two. I often feel like a square peg in a round hole doing this course, but now that I have started it I'll see it through.

I had the experience on Thursday night of seeing the city in complete darkness and hearing the air-raid sirens during a practice, with searchlights sweeping the sky.

I may as well tell you that there is no hope of Christmas leave, as the only leave will be four days at the end of six months. The only way I could get leave to come home would be if someone was seriously ill.

27 November 1942

I went up to Newcastle on Saturday to see Aunty Kit. The train was the Newcastle Flyer and she flies at over 80 miles an hour around Wyong. It was only 13 shillings (\$1.30) return, even without the RAAF concession. We went into Newcastle beach which was covered with barbed wire, so we couldn't swim.

We marched through Sydney in the big Liberty Loan March on Wednesday in the rain, and did pretty well, considering the conditions. We were praised by the officers, and the newspapers, too. A formation of the new Australian-built fighters, which look like Wirraways, flew over the parade and put on a show afterwards.

As regards my letter-writing (or lack of it), I can't always find time as I have so many to write and don't always feel like it; I also like to get out of camp whenever we have leave.

1 December 1942

We have our final tests on Monday and have to choose our mustering. I am putting three choices: flight rigger, instrument repairer and armourer. We had a quiz on Monday on fitting and I got 85%. If I get flight rigger it will take me to Melbourne, but I will telegram you and let you know as soon as I do.

My leave application has been stamped NOT APPROVED, so that is that. The WOD told me that leave over 250 miles is only given in exceptional circumstances. I got the photo I had taken of me and it's terrible – fit only for the fire.

John, you will never guess what I saw this morning! Three beautiful Spitfires about 20,000 feet up. They were almost silent and looked great, in perfect formation. So I have seen the best plane in the world, something I never expected to see out here.

The other day our electrical theory instructor showed us some interesting material, which he said came from one of the Jap subs sunk in the attack in Sydney Harbour in June. It looked like cotton wool but was shiny and brittle when you touched it. He said it was made of glass fibres as thin as cotton and that it came from the batteries which power the sub, and thought that they used it to separate the plates in the battery, to save weight. So the Japs are cleverer than we think.

9 December 1942

Two English RAF airmen have just moved into our dormitory. They escaped from Malaya to Java after the surrender and then had to leave there. They have also been in Lagos in Nigeria and were in London during the blitz, so have been around a bit. They have a Cockney twang and are real hard cases.

I have given up hope of leave before being posted south, as leave is one of those things you have to give up in the services. I'll be thinking of home wherever I am and will try to make Christmas as enjoyable as I can. Never think of coming down here while you can stay on the farm with such a good family to support you. Sydney is not a good place to be in wartime, with Yanks half-strangling girls as they walk down the streets with them.

*Later:* We have got our final exam results in electrical theory, fitting and drawing, and I did fairly well. I have got what I applied for – Flight Riggers' Course – and have to go to No.1 Engineering School at Ascot Vale in Melbourne with a couple of others out of 567 Flight. One of the RAF boys said it is a good camp and is handy to the city. I dread the thought of all the queuing up, parading, marching around and waiting, which seems to be typical of RAAF procedure; however, I intend to make the best of things there, although I've heard the weather isn't much chop.

*A political version of the Lord's Prayer (c. 1942)*

Our Prime Minister which art in Canberra, Curtin be thy name,  
Thy taxation come, Thy will be done in Sydney as  
in Perth, Give us this day our deferred pay, And forgive us  
our AWL, As we forgive the fifth columnists who work  
against us. Lead us not into the Army, But deliver us from  
the Japs, For thine is the manpower, the taxation and the  
austerity, For Evatt and Evatt, A. Dedman.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *A long way from home*

There was little interstate travel before World War II, due to the interaction of several factors. Families had no need to move interstate because employment was usually available in the local area. Employees tended to remain in the same job for their working life if they were men, and, if women, married someone in their own locality, whom they had probably known since childhood. Even if they had relatives in another state, travel was inhibited by cost and distance. Few people owned cars, and if they did the roads did not encourage adventurous long trips. Changes of railway gauge at the state borders, such as at Albury, made train travel inconvenient, almost as if one was entering another country.

My parents owned a 1930 four-cylinder Pontiac sedan, which they drove from Kempsey to Sydney in 1935, a distance of 500 km. The journey took two days, with river crossings by vehicle ferry at the Hastings, Manning, Hunter and Hawkesbury Rivers. There were no motels, and the dusty, corrugated gravel Pacific "Highway" was a hazard to tyres, springs and axles. Today it is an easy six hour drive.

Apart from the trains, the little interstate travel which did occur was done by the coastal steamers, which were very

Extract, Melbourne "Sun," 7/1/42.

### Value of American Money in Australian Currency

5 cents	3½d.
10 cents	7d.
25 cents	1/6
50 cents	3/-
75 cents	4/7
1 dollar	6/1
2 dollars	12/2
3 dollars	18/4
4 dollars	24/6
5 dollars	30/8
6 dollars	36/10
7 dollars	42/12
8 dollars	48/14
9 dollars	54/16
10 dollars	60/18
15 dollars	90/27
20 dollars	120/36
25 dollars	150/45
30 dollars	180/54
50 dollars	300/90
100 dollars	600/180

*With the Compliments of*

**TREADWAY'S**  
Bourke Street, Melbourne.

*US currency conversion chart printed in anticipation of US "troop invasion", 7 January 1942.*

popular. Air travel was still in its infancy and could only be afforded by the wealthy, or those with urgent business commitments in another capital.

Strangely enough, the little I did know about Melbourne and Victoria came from listening to the powerful AWA radio Dad had bought in 1938. With its long, high, outside aerial, we could clearly pick up the Melbourne stations, 3DB and 3LK, "The Herald Stations", and on Saturday night listened to live dance music on 3DB. At school, in geography, I had learned the names of the north-flowing tributaries of the Murray River, knew that brown coal was mined at Yallourn and black coal at Wonthaggi, and that fruit was grown in the irrigation area at Shepparton. In history, I had learned that John Batman had paid the aborigines for the site of Melbourne with blankets and trinkets, and that Surveyor Mitchell, the explorer, had discovered "Australia Felix" in the west. I had



By 1944 some current operational aircraft had replaced obsolete pre-war aircraft. Clockwise from lower left: Westland Wapiti, Curtis P-40 Kittyhawk, CAC Wirraway, Wackett trainer, Bristol Beaufighter, Vultee Vengeance, CAC Boomerang.

never heard of the Eureka Stockade, of Australian Rules Football, of Flinders Street Railway Station, the Dandenongs or "The Bay". I had heard of "Squizzy" Taylor, the notorious criminal, and of the razor gangs of the twenties.

My knowledge of Australia's second largest city was about to increase exponentially and at the same time I would undergo a monumental change in attitude.

### Letters from No.1 Engineering School, Ascot Vale, Victoria

13 December 1942

We paraded at Darlington at 7.30 a.m. on Saturday, handed in our palliasses, and were given a lecture about behaviour on the troop train to Melbourne. As we did not have to be at Central Station until 6.00 p.m., I walked down to George Street to see the big Munitions Parade. It is amazing what they are making in Australia now, especially the medium Matilda tanks, heavy and light Ack-Ack guns, the new Owen sub-machine guns, all types of trucks, Bren gun carriers, bulldozers and all sorts of factory machinery. There were 120 Bren gun carriers, two abreast — I thought they would never end.

When I got back to Ultimo, some of the chaps were drunk, despite repeated warnings, but got away with it. We were marched to Central, where we boarded first class carriages on a special troop train, along with other RAAF, RAN, AIF and the usual Yanks. It was a fast trip to Albury, only stopping for refreshments and water, and I slept most of the eleven hours. We had breakfast on the platform at Albury, which is the longest in Australia, over a quarter of a mile long, and then had a look at the town. When we got back, the *Spirit of Progress* was loading up and isn't she a bit of style — airconditioned and all steel, with fixed windows and each carriage flush with the end of the next. We left in special carriages of the second division of the Melbourne Express at 9.20 a.m., and were glad to leave



*The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria Showgrounds at Ascot Vale, as they were for the first post-war show, 1946.*

Albury's flies. The Victorian train looked almost antiquated, and the country down to Melbourne was mostly dead flat and monotonous. We arrived at Spencer Street Station at 2.45 p.m., very hungry and travel-weary.

When we arrived at the showgrounds, which is where No.1 RAAF Engineering School is situated, we had another medical inspection, were issued with our cutlery, mug and palliase, and then found our sleeping quarters, which are in No.3 Cattle Pavilion. The shed is fitted out with dormitories, separated by six feet six inch plywood partitions, with 15 beds in each. Even though it is midsummer it is very chilly and reminds me of Armidale, but I am looking forward to settling in and seeing the city at government expense. Ascot Vale showgrounds are just like a small town, with every show building put to some use. There is a big hospital, a picture show, canteen, cafe and three services welfare huts run by volunteers. There are pictures four times a week, dances and concerts. We have to get up at 5.45 a.m., and there are hot showers under one of the grandstands just

across the street, while the mess is only 200 yards away and the lecture area about the same. I've just had my first meal since we left Albury and it's like a first class hotel after Darlington. Today's menu was:

Breakfast – Porridge, bubble and squeak, fried egg and bacon.

Dinner (Lunch) – Meat pies with potato and pumpkin, trifle and jelly.

Tea (Dinner) – Cold mutton, pickles, beetroot, tomato, onion, cold curried potato, grated carrot, soup, and pineapple jam on the table, with a choice of a hot meal if you wanted it.

So you can see how well they are looking after your son and expect I'll soon be putting on weight.

Leave is from 4.30 p.m. till 10.00 p.m. four nights a week, with Tuesday a closed camp or "panic night", when we have to do our washing and ironing and clean up our bay. Weekend leave is from 4.00 p.m. Saturday until Monday morning. As soon as I can find someone who knows his way around, I'll go and have a look at Melbourne. However, the meal hours are going to take some getting used to. Breakfast is at 6.00 a.m., dinner at 10.30 a.m. and tea at 3.45 p.m., and with daylight saving all these times are really an hour earlier. It is still broad daylight at 9.00 p.m.

#### 17 December 1942

I started work today in No.229 Flight Riggers' Course, which will last eleven weeks. We have three weeks of theory of flight, three days on splicing, three days on doping, three weeks on hydraulics, three weeks on aircraft maintenance and then, I hope, a posting to a squadron. I will lap up theory of flight as it interests me, and there are training planes in the classroom to demonstrate the theory. We have already taken the wings, undercarriage and tail off a Moth and are now re-assembling the old crate and then will have to rig her, which means making sure everything has been put back true and square. As we progress we get to work on more modern planes, such as the Wirraway.



*Trainee flight riggers in Theory of Flight classroom (poultry pavilion) with Tiger Moth instructional aircraft. The NA-16 Wirraway prototype, also used as an instructional airframe, is just visible, top centre.*

Our instructor is very good, and a hard case, and the boys are always side-tracking him. He told us that when we get to the maintenance phase and have to start the planes out on the arena, we will need a change of underwear afterwards. Some of the boys are finding the theory a bit hard to pick up, but I have a good start with what I learned building models.

Yesterday we found our way into the city and I put my name down at the American Red Cross for a private home for Christmas Day. We also saw the Yarra River, which is the subject of jokes by the interstate boys, but there are lovely parks on the other side. The shops don't seem as good as the big ones in Sydney, but the streets are wider and all cross at right angles and I noticed, coming in on the train, that all the roads are tree-lined. Melbourne doesn't seem nearly as air-raïd conscious as Sydney. Car headlights aren't masked,

the shop windows aren't boarded up, I haven't seen any shelters in the streets and there is no blackout. There are no surf beaches, as Port Phillip is all enclosed water.

One thing we all notice, though, are the girls — you would think you were in Hollywood, as they have lovely peaches-and-cream complexions. They say that Melbourne is jealous of Sydney but that if you kid them about their beautiful city with its fine river and parks and gardens you will get on OK.

*Letter from home 18 December 1942*

We were pleased to get your long letter yesterday and to hear that you had arrived safely in Melbourne. You are a long way from home now, Les, and there are all sorts of temptations in big cities like that, especially when you have no friends or relations to spend your leave with, but we trust you will always do the right thing, Les. Dad and I have always tried to do our best to bring you up the right way, so always think of us if anything crops up to tempt you. I know you are sensible and level-headed, but am just passing on some motherly advice.

I posted you a fruit cake today and will try and send another one soon. At present Dad is preparing to send you a torch, but will leave the batteries out to save weight.

Today we went straight from milking to pick beans, and four of us had picked four three-bushel bags by 1.00 p.m., and will put them on the milk lorry to catch tonight's train, so hope to clear a bit on them. It is hard work and as we are hand-milking 29 cows now, it is a lot of work for us.

*Mum*

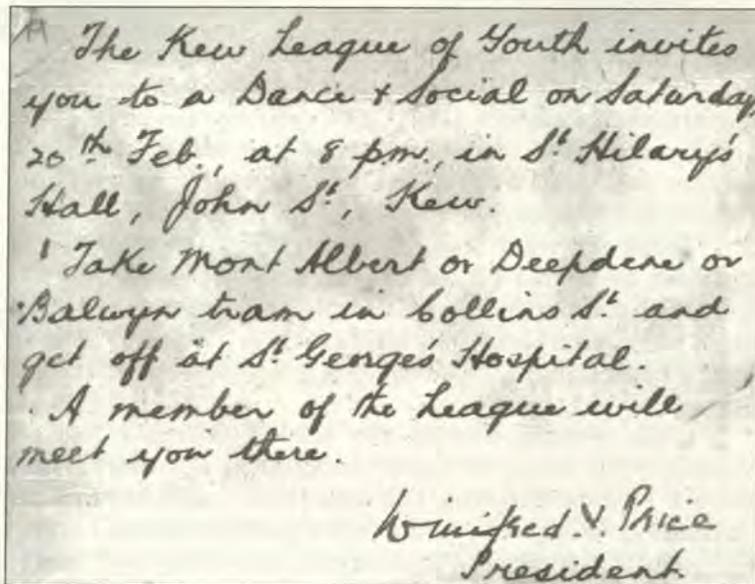
I am writing this at the school, where I am on Volunteer Air Observer Corps duty, but it is a quiet night. We are pleased that you like your new camp better than Darlington. Whatever you do, pick a good mate to get about with, and remember the crooks you hear about over there. Make the most of your stay and see all you can. The torch I am posting is a small token for the 25th, and may it be a guiding light in any dark times you have to pass through, or are confronted by. Its light will show you the right path, full

of all the happiness and joy this Xmas tide can bring. Eat, drink and be merry wherever you spend it, we will miss you and hope that you will be with us in civilian life twelve months hence. Cheerio for now, and the end of the war in the New Year is our earnest wish. *Dad*

24 December 1942

It's Christmas Eve and cold, after three sweltering days, so Melbourne's weather is true to form. I went to the camp Christmas concert, put on by a Melbourne party, and it was a great show, although some of the sketches were a bit in the Tivoli style.

I got the fruit cake yesterday and it's a beauty, moist and fresh, and as there are only five in this bay at present it should last a while. I have now saved enough to buy a clarinet, but have not decided yet whether to or not. I keep



The Kew League of Youth invites  
you to a Dance & Social on Saturday  
20<sup>th</sup> Feb., at 8 p.m., in St. Hilary's  
Hall, John St., Kew.  
Take Mont Albert or Deepdene or  
Balwyn tram in Collins St. and  
get off at St. George's Hospital.  
A member of the League will  
meet you there.  
Winifred V. Price  
President.

Typical example of Melbourne hospitality for the armed forces. The invitations were available at the Hospitality and Information Bureau in Collins Street.

my spare cash in my money belt and only take it off to have a shower. I just gave a mate a piece of your cake and he said, "Tell your mother she is a damned good cook!"

It's funny how, when you first come into a new camp, you feel new and green in front of the old hands but try not to show it, then after a couple of weeks you act like a veteran. You begin to get more confidence and feel more sure of yourself, go to the head of queues and give the newcomers "the good guts" on everything. A very important factor is your home state, and in our flight of 15 every state is represented. All have nicknames: cornstalks (NSW), banana-benders (Qld), crow-eaters (SA), sand-gropers (WA) and so on, and there is fierce argument about who has the best beaches.

Being in uniform makes a big difference to your attitude, as it gives you the confidence to ask your way around a strange city, and to look after yourself generally. I know that I would not be out of it for anything, in spite of all the restrictions.

26 December 1942 Extra Special

*Local Boy Dines with Melbourne Society*

Just wait till I get this off my chest! Yesterday I left camp at 9.00 a.m. and went into the city to get the address of the family I was to have Christmas dinner with, from the Hospitality Bureau. When we got there, we found that they had changed us to another place, which was probably a change for the better, as you will find later on.

We were told to go to Mrs Neville Smith's in Canterbury for the day. I smelt a rat immediately, as people don't usually have their husband's name in front of them, and that this would not be an ordinary Smith. We went from Flinders Street to Canterbury in one of Melbourne's slow, antique electric trains, and by using our tongues, managed to find Canterbury Road, which, as usual in Melbourne, was broad and tree-lined with beautiful homes along it. We found No.10 was no exception, with a big garden around the brick and tile house.

I was welcomed at the door by Mrs Smith and

introduced to her two children, both under six, who had the lounge room full of toys. Then the family began to arrive, their age range being from three to 85, so it was a real homely atmosphere. Four of them were old people and the rest were grandchildren, 18 in all. One of the women works in the Victorian Railways, in the tourist section, and issues permits for interstate travel, so I am right if ever I want a permit to go over the border.

They put on a great dinner and we helped after with the drying up, then played table tennis until tea.

They had been expecting an army captain nephew to come during the afternoon. We were just starting tea when in walked the young army captain and his father, who is Major General Whitelaw from North Head Garrison in Sydney, with his wife. Well, we were nervous and embarrassed at being introduced to such a personage and didn't know whether we should salute him or hide behind the nearest door. However, I shook hands with him, and his wife and son, and we went on with our tea.

One of the women suggested that we get everyone present to sign our serviettes, so she approached the Major-General and got his, his wife's and son's signatures. I am enclosing the serviette and you will see the "red tab's" has MGRA under it (Major General Royal Artillery).

Well, after tea we found him to be an ordinary chap. He had a movie camera and took some shots of his nieces and nephews with it. He wasn't quite sure how to operate it and I was able to use my knowledge acquired at teachers' college to help him.

We left at 8.30 p.m., feeling very pleased with ourselves, and were asked to come again whenever we liked. As they are, or seem to be, people who don't entertain plain AC1's every day, we must have made a good impression. They were not la-di-da, but were pretty refined, just the same. Mr Neville Smith looked a well-to-do businessman of about 40 and his charming wife was a bit younger.

By the way, to accompany Christmas dinner there was ale of which I partook a glass, as I could not very well refuse it at Xmas, but otherwise keep just as shy of it as ever.

Well, so much for that little episode. It's one Christmas I'll never forget.

[When the above letter was printed in *The Australian* in December 1980, one of the Smith family who had seen it contacted me and arranged a reunion of the surviving members at a dinner hosted by Mrs Smith, who still lived in the same house. My wife and I sat down at the same table, in the same dining room as I had 38 years earlier. I was able to return to her the autographed serviette, which I had kept as a memento of the occasion.]

#### *Letter from Home 26 December 1942*

Well, Xmas 1942 has passed and another year of war over our heads, but let's hope 1943 will see us celebrating peace. Our thoughts were with you and we wondered what you were doing, and who were the good people who offered you homeliness whilst so far from home. Let us know their address, as I would like to thank them for their kindness. Your chair was vacant and turned away from the table.

It was the hottest day this summer and after the heavy rain the farm is a picture. The calves are mud-fat and we put out five cans of milk this morning for Nestles, and expect to have 700 pounds of butterfat this month. On the other hand, the beans we picked were a washout at the Sydney markets. I sent 29 bags away and am afraid I will have to send a cheque to cover the rail freight and agent's commission, as the market was glutted with a record supply, and they fell to one shilling a bushel, or three shillings a bag. So I will let them rot in the ground.

I estimate we had 200 bushels and a month earlier would have cleared in the vicinity of 100 pounds. The Curtin government preaches "grow more vegetables for the war effort", so why the hell doesn't the government build factories to process the surplus. I have about 30 melon vines, which look real good, and I got £17 and 5 shillings a ton for my 18 bags of potatoes, and have another four to send.

There are not many soldiers in Kempsey now, but it is said that an Air Force camp is coming and it would be great

if such were the case and you were posted here. How is your cash? Don't carry too much on you and send me the surplus to bank for you.

It is rumoured that the ban on stock grazing on the roadside will be lifted soon. [The ban was imposed during the invasion scare of mid-1942 to prevent stock, which farmers turned out on to the roadside to graze, from impeding the movement of troops or the evacuation in the event of a Japanese landing.]

There is very little traffic on the road, due to petrol rationing, and while we have enough for trips to town, there is little left for trips to the beach, although they say there are plenty of campers at South-West Rocks and all the guest-houses are full. *Dad*

#### *A Letter I Did Not Send New Year's Day, 1943*

As we did not want to spend New Year's Eve in camp, a mate got the address of a place where a house party was being held. It was in Reservoir, a northern suburb, where some young women had invited up to six servicemen to welcome in the New Year with them.

When we arrived there was a lively party already in progress. As beer was rationed, the main drink available seemed to be port, vulgarly known as leg-opener because of its reputed aphrodisiacal powers. As I was just 18 and a non-drinker, I did not know how to handle the situation. Not only that, but in one of the rooms, the dining room I think it was, there was a pile of mattresses under the table. One of the girls told us this was their air-raid shelter!

Our suspicions that we were out of our depth seemed to be confirmed when one of the older "diggers" disappeared upstairs to a bedroom with one of the women. I felt it was time to escape before I got into real strife, and my mate felt the same.

With the words of my mother when I first left home ringing in my ears, "not to do anything that I would be ashamed to tell them", we decided to leave as unobtrusively as possible. We moved to an unoccupied front room, eased the window open, slid a leg over the sill and dropped a

couple of feet to the lawn. As we did, one of the women came looking for us. When she saw the open window and our backs disappearing up the street, she flung after us, "Blue orchid bastards!"

When we reached the safety of the city we caught a tram to Luna Park, where we welcomed in 1943, our virtue and self-respect still intact, but a little wiser in the ways of women and men.

#### *9 January 1943*

This week we have had a sample of every kind of weather Melbourne can throw at us — cold, cloudy, clear, bleak, wet and sunny. You make me envious describing the big breakers at South-West Rocks. I think that if Melbourne people saw them they'd panic, thinking it was a tidal wave. Their only beach close to the city is at St Kilda, which the local chaps say was carted there by horse and dray — no kidding!

After three days of it I have changed my mind about learning to splice, as I just about broke my heart today, trying to splice 1/4 inch wire rope. Every tuck seemed to go wrong, whereas I just flew through the manila rope.

On Monday we start on hydraulics, which they say is tough, but it should be interesting learning how the undercarriage retracts, the flaps go up and down and the bomb doors open and close, on about 15 different kites up to the new Beauforts. I should be a "Jack of all Trades" when I finish the course. It will be three months on the 13th since I joined up, and already I feel like a veteran.

On Saturday I saw a very vivid newsreel of the front-line fighting at Buna, in New Guinea. The cameraman was right up with the diggers as they cleared Japs out of their foxholes with rifles, bayonets and grenades, while our artillery shelled them from only half a mile away. You've no idea what it must be like till you see it on the screen, and the conditions under which our boys are fighting the Japs. There was also a newsreel of the men of "Sparrow Force" in Timor, which must have been smuggled out.

When we were in town we had a look at the Jap midget submarine, made up of bits and pieces from those that were



*Westland Wapiti aircraft in Rigging Section, No.1 Engineering School, Ascot Vale Showgrounds.*



*A Japanese midget submarine assembled from the parts of two sunk in an attack by three in Sydney Harbour, 31 May 1942, on display in Melbourne, January 1943.*

sunk. Having nothing else to do, we went out to what is called The Power House Club, which on Sunday afternoons has dancing and free meals, with big salads, ice-cream, cakes and tea. The Melbourne people would do anything to make the boys feel at home. They must give up a good deal of their time. The girls at the Power House all have to be specially selected for it, so they were an extra nice lot. It was formerly a rowing club on Albert Park Lake, right in the city. By queuing up at Kodak's I was able to get a film, so will send you some photos of the city, so you will know where I've been.

14 January 1943

Our course has been lengthened by a week, so we have another six weeks to go. WAAAFs are now going to be trained as mechanics, riggers, instrument repairers, etc, which means they will go out to the Flying Training Schools, so we should see more active service in future. Usually flight riggers go out for a few months before returning to do a conversion course to Fitter IIA, and go into Pay Group 1 at eleven shillings and sixpence a day.

We are well into hydraulics now, and as it is pretty complicated you have to concentrate, but I find it very interesting. I got 85% in a progress test, and so far not one of the 38 on our course has dropped out, unlike the flight mechanics, only 6 out of 40 passing the last exam. So they apparently have an over-supply of them in the field.

I have a very good routine now in the mornings. I get up at 6.00 a.m., dress, make my "bed", sweep around it, have breakfast and am on the parade ground by 6.35 a.m. You would be proud of me!

I suppose Trevor Judd will be flying on operations by now - half his luck! [Trevor Judd was the neighbour's son who kindled my interest in aviation when he gave me a bundle of *Flying Aces* magazines. He was later killed in operations over the Mediterranean Sea in a Wellington bomber of No.104 Squadron, RAF.]

I had a good weekend at the billet, which was at Sandringham, down on the Bay. The lady of the house was



*The "Dug-out" Allied Services Club in the basement of Capitol House, staffed by Myer.*

an Englishwoman from Liverpool, and she had an older male boarder. One son was a civilian and another a sergeant pilot in the RAAF. She had a very attractive daughter, but she dropped the hint for us to keep our distance and told us she had over 40 airmen stay there, so we didn't stand a chance with that competition. It is a nice suburb, with some decent-sized two storey houses like this one, but the beach is very narrow and it was too cold to swim. We enjoyed being able to sleep in until 10.30 a.m. on Sunday, and sleeping in a bed with white sheets was welcome after the palliase and grey blankets.

On the way back to camp on Sunday night we dropped into the "Dug-out", which is a services club and hostel in the basement of the Capitol Theatre in Swanston Street. It is run by Myers, and their staff give their time for nothing. It has the best orchestra I've heard, led by Australia's best drummer, George Watson, so it is very popular with the Yanks. There is a big crowd of them in town again and they do well with the girls, mostly the not-so-respectable type.

Next Sunday, the Tivoli show with Jenny Howard is coming to camp. Admission is sixpence and we have already

booked seats up near the front. You won't like this news, but we can't get home leave until we've been out on a station for a month. What you can do is write as often as possible. This is not a hint, Mum, but you can buy Willow cake tins to cook and send cakes in. If you can't buy plum jam now it's because we've been getting it on the tables, with golden syrup, for about a month now.

24 January 1943

The cooks have had another go at poisoning me. I had diarrhoea and vomited all night, even the water I drank. Before I could go on sick parade I had to go on normal parade at 6.40 a.m., and could hardly stand up. I saw the "quack", who said I have gastro-enteritis and prescribed bismuth three times a day. A few others got it and put it down to some stew we had.

I am OK again now and celebrated my good marks in the hydraulics exam with tea in town at the Dug-out. Unfortunately, my mate was on CB (Confined to Barracks) for not sweeping around his palliase. There were plenty of Yanks in town and it is pretty wild again.

The Yanks are Marines on leave from fighting in the Solomons, so they must have been able to send big reinforcements. I was talking to one who comes from Manhattan, right in the centre of New York. He showed me some aluminium coins the Japs are using for occupation money. He said that the Japs are paid ten yen a month, which is about ten shillings in our money. A Yank private gets about \$60 a month, which is about £18 in our money, compared with our £10 a month, so you can see why they are popular with the girls. They have no trouble picking them up.

Most of them have tons of back pay, so everyone fleeces them, even the girls they take out. He told me a mate lost £104 that way. I was behind one the other night buying a train ticket, and he gave the clerk sixpence for a twopenny ticket. Instead of taking the change he turned to me and said, "Here Aussie. Buy yours with this. I don't want a threepence". They are generous with their cigarettes too,

as they pay only sixpence for ten, while ours are tenpence.

The chap I was talking to said they all have malaria in their system and it affects them on route marches. The Marines all wear a big Guadalcanal colour patch on their left shoulder, in addition to all their other ribbons and medals. It is a big blue diamond with the Southern Cross in white and a big red "1" with Guadalcanal stitched down it, as they belong to the First Marine Division. Their uniform is a green brown serge, whereas the army's is brown.

A lot of the girls I've danced with say they are sick of the Yanks with so many here, but I think they deserve a spell after the fighting in the Solomons, don't you? There has been one more attempted murder, similar to the Leonski murders but it was not fatal. Fellows who were here when the murders were being committed said that an Aussie could always be sure of having a girl accept his offer to see her home after a dance.

I can stand the Yanks so long as they don't start on that "we've come here to save you" business.



Services free pass to one of many Town Hall dances in Melbourne.

1 February 1943

We had tea at the American Hospitality Centre on Wednesday, while some of my mates made the best of things at Young and Jacksons [the famous Melbourne hotel on the corner of Flinders and Swanston Streets] before the beer ran out. From there, we went to a dance at Caulfield Town Hall, which is about the best of the town hall dances, although they all have good orchestras and vocalists. Another popular dance is the Leggett's Ballroom in Prahran, an inner suburb, where there are two orchestras, one playing old-time and the other modern dance music. The locals skite that it is the biggest in Australia.

When we got back to Flinders Street at 12.30 a.m. we had missed the last tram back to Ascot Vale, so had to wait an hour and a half for a taxi. We packed ten into the one taxi, so it was only ten shillings each. The tram ride is tenpence — if you can get one!

I don't think I have told you about the canteen here, in the Rosella Building. It has a big serve-yourself counter where you can buy penny cakes, bread rolls, hot pies, sandwiches and a cup of tea. They also sell bottles of soft drink by the thousand. Across the street is another canteen which sells chocolates, sweets, toiletries, stationery, cigarettes etc, so we are well catered for.

The meals haven't been too bad lately. For dinner we had fried chop in breadcrumbs, baked potato, peas and turnip, and for dessert three half pears with blancmange.

Today we started on maintenance phase, which is the last part of the course, so we are on the last lap. Hasn't the time flown? We will be working on the old kites out on the showgrounds arena and boy, aren't some of them old! The oldest are a Gypsy Moth and a Moth Minor. Then there is a huge Westland Wapiti, a little Bristol Bulldog and a beaut Hawker Demon. We have had a lecture on starting a kite by swinging the prop. The drill is hammered home by some bloody and gruesome pictures of fellows the instructor had seen hit by propellers, and it made us shaky at the knees. He also told us that the first time we start the Wapiti or the Demon we would need a change of underwear if it backfires, as the exhausts are right next to your ears.

Talking of planes, John, I've seen the new Australian-built fighter, based on the Wirraway but with a 1,200 hp radial engine. It was being tested from an aerodrome just across the Yarra, where the factory is.

The mail has been very good lately. There are two deliveries every day, except Saturday, at 10.30 a.m. and 3.45 p.m., and your letters posted on Monday arrive in the first delivery on Wednesday, which is good for 1,000 miles by train.

#### 7 February 1943

I saw a newsreel last night in camp of the landings in North Africa and Rommel's retreat. Some of the RAAF from the courses are being sent to India, which I suppose will be the next drive. I think it would be preferable to New Guinea. The Germans are going to face the music now, with the Russians keeping the Nazis' faces turned towards the Fatherland. So you can see, I still follow the war news and see a daily paper. The paper boys come around the camp selling them everywhere except the toilets.

The Tivoli Show was great and had old "Mo" (Roy Rene) who gets away with anything on the stage, and also Bob Dyer, the Yank Hillbilly, so it was a good show. I am trying to darn a black sock at the moment, as there is a kit inspection tomorrow and I want everything right for it. We have been getting ARP (Air-Raid Precautions) duty nearly every night, so I haven't had much time for my housekeeping lately.

We have been learning how and when to inspect planes and fill in the maintenance forms. A plane has to be inspected every morning before it flies, and after every flight. There are detailed inspections after it has flown 40 hours, up till 240 hours when there is a major inspection. When we do an inspection we have to sign for what we have done and take full responsibility for it. You can refuse to sign the certificate if you think there is anything wrong with the kite. So you see, the job is pretty responsible and it wouldn't be very nice to have a pilot's life on your conscience, so that makes you take extra care.

I have bumped into a few of the boys I went to teachers' college with, on leave in Melbourne, and one I boarded with, who is at the Initial Training School for Aircrew at Somers. I have also discovered I am not the only teacher on our course and feel a bit better about that.

Who said Melbourne only has cold weather? The temperatures for the last week have been 92, 104, 106, 103, 76 and 107 degrees (fahrenheit).

#### 16 February 1943

I have had a go at starting the planes recently and on Friday swung a Gypsy Moth. First we had a practice swing, with the engine dead, and then we did a live start. I didn't feel too confident, but after seeing the others start it with one simple flick I felt better, and when my turn came made a pretty good job of it.

The Corporal sits in the cockpit and says, "Switches



*In Maintenance Phase trainees practised starting (from lower left) Avro Cadet, Westland Wapiti, Fairey Battle, CAC Wirraway, Wacket trainer, Moth Minor. The cattle pavilions in the background were used as barracks.*

off. Petrol on. Throttle closed. Suck in," and you repeat it. Then you position the prop at "ten past four" so that you can just reach the tip. Walking well clear of the prop, you walk back to the front cockpit and switch on the starting magneto. Then back to the front and say, "All clear. Contact," which the Corporal or pilot repeats. Give her a hard swing and, if you are lucky, she starts. Once she is idling, you walk back to the switches again, giving the spinning prop a wide berth, and switch on the other magneto. You have to remember that the switches work opposite to a light switch, as "Up" is on and "Down" is off. That's all there is to it.

Only the small trainers, like the Moths, have to be swung, as the others have inertia starters which have to be wound up like cranking a car, and the really modern ones have self-starters, which should be a piece of cake, like a modern car.

Next day we started the Hawker Demon, which has to be wound up by a handle just under the stubby exhaust pipes. I was a bit scared while waiting for the engine to catch and wondering if she would backfire. Fortunately she didn't and the handle can't kick back like a car. We had to make two starts, as the procedure is different for each side.

Then we had to start the Wapiti which, the Corporal said, is a cranky old cuss. She came out over 15 years ago and has two huge wings with miles of wire and a huge prop which turns so slowly you can count the revolutions, almost. She has to be wound, too, but by now I was more confident. You have to stand on the lower wing, or mainplane as we have to call them, and the exhaust points straight at your legs. I was clever and waited until she had been started a few times and was warm. I didn't have any trouble at all.

We have also had lectures on fire precautions, parachutes, night flying procedures, aerodrome signals and lighting, and general work on the tarmac, which has all been very interesting.

When we finish I hardly dare hope for a coastal station and think in terms of Temora, Parkes or Wagga. The latest

rumour is that after we leave here we will do a RAAF Commando Course, as we haven't done our "rookies" course yet.

The WAAAF mechanics and riggers will arrive here soon for training, and they are altering one of the cattle pavilions for them and building new lavatories. There are hundreds of them here already, training as telegraphists, so they are no novelty.

I went into town on Wednesday and saw *To The Shores Of Tripoli*, about the United States Marines and good propaganda for them, with thousands camped here. I had tea after at the Power House – cold meats and salad, cakes and tea, with huge servings all for free – and stayed for the dance. We had to wear our drab jackets with shorts and long socks and I must have looked a real gig; I certainly felt one.

I hope you are keeping all my letters, which should form a diary of my time in Melbourne.

I went to the pictures again on Saturday and saw *Holiday Inn*, starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire, which was worth seeing. There was also a good newsreel of the war in the Pacific, showing Jap planes attacking a US Carrier, and another of the AIF clearing the Japs from the jungle swamps at Sanananda in New Guinea. Then I went to the dance at the Dug-out to listen to the George Watson Orchestra.

Next Saturday my mate and I are going to the races at Flemington, which is just over the fence from here, so that I can say I've been to the track where the Melbourne Cup is run.

21 February 1943

Well, here I am, writing as a "ten bob a day man" after 19 weeks of training. It's a good feeling to know that at last you are ready to do a real job. I came out with an average of 78%, which isn't real brilliant. We have been working on assembling a Kittyhawk fighter from bits and pieces of crashes before we go the "Pool" to await our postings. There are still rumours we will have to do the so-called

“Commando Course”, which could mean we are headed for the islands.

Today is cloudy and wintry and I hope I’ll be posted to a warmer climate. The local boys say you never get used to the changes in the weather in Melbourne, and I can believe them.

I suppose Sydney is on its toes again, after having a Jap plane overhead. They slipped up badly in not bringing it down, unless it was exceptionally high. Notice the paper I am writing on. I started with paper from the C of E hut and now am on Methodist paper, but can also use RC, Presbyterian, Campaigners for Christ, Salvation Army, Australian Comforts Fund or YWCA writing paper, as they all have recreation huts in the camp.

The US Marines are still in charge here, and I have seen a few fights stopped just in time by the Military Police. There was a big brawl on Saturday, with the servicemen and civilians all in it, hitting at anyone they saw. If the Yanks aren’t in charge here after the war “I’ll drop my pants in Myers’ window”, which is a local expression. By the way, the Guadalcanal colour patch they wear is from the Australian Government as a token of appreciation.

Last night I went to the Tivoli Show Artists and Models in camp. It is a show where the girls have no clothing coupons, if you know what I mean, but it was a good show. Right after it, I had to go on guard duty at the main entrance, with a 0.38 revolver with five rounds in case of trouble. I was with a RAAF Service Police Corporal, and did two hours on and two off in shifts, from 11.00 p.m. until 5.00 a.m. It was freezing, even though it is still summer — what a climate! I’d hate to have to spend a lifetime here.

Thanks for all your letters. There’s no doubt, mail is always the most important thing in camp. You soon realise that when you see the faces of the boys who haven’t had any for a while and miss out again. The main thing is not to give up hope.

Fancy a cheque for £60 for the month from the 40 Jerseys! I hope you can keep it up, after the bad seasons a couple of years ago.

*Letter from Home* 28 February 1943

We have been listening to “Tokyo Rose” on short wave, and she said that Churchill had only been shamming illness to avoid having to attend the Soviet anniversary celebrations. What do you think of the latest big raids on Germany? They must be smashing the country up. Selwyn [cousin and Tobruk Rat] and Sid [former farmhand] are due home from the Middle East any day, so there will be some excitement when they return home.

I’ll be jolly glad when this stupid daylight saving ends as I am so tired by night, and there is another month of it yet. Thanks for your birthday wishes and for the cake tin full of chocolates. I’ll make you another fruit cake soon. I’ll be pleased to get a RAAF brooch, as I’ve always wanted one since you joined the Air Force, and see a lot of mothers wearing them. *Mum*

28 February 1943

Well, at last I have my posting and it’s to No.1 Wireless Air Gunners’ School at Ballarat in Victoria, so get out the atlas and find it. I am disappointed at not going north, but that’s the way it is in this racket. Luckily, five boys from 229 Course are posted with me, all from NSW, so I will have some mates. I’ve heard that it is bitterly cold there in winter. That’s my fourth move in four months, and so far I’ve earned £48 and 6 shillings in my pay book, and as I am now in Pay Group 2 will be on 10 shillings a day.

Well, I’ll close my comments, views, news and impressions of Melbourne with, “Look out Ballarat, here I come!”

## CHAPTER FIVE

# *A garden city full of Yanks*

### Letters from No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School, Ballarat, Victoria

2 March 1943

After getting cleared from Ascot Vale we said goodbye to our course mates, took our luggage to Spencer Street Station and caught the 2.25 p.m. train to Adelaide. Boy, was it an antique, with old gas lamps in the roof! We had to stand most of the way, as there were quite a few boys of the 9th "Divvie" going home on leave. They were easy to recognise by their "T"-shaped (Tobruk) colour patches and faded uniforms from the desert sun.

On arrival at Ballarat we were taken out by truck to No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School (No.1 WAGS), which is about seven miles out on the western side of the city. It is a pretty city and is called the "Garden City", but is full of Yanks. They are marines, and by the number in the streets there must be thousands of them, as they seem to far outnumber the civvies. From what I've been told they are not very popular.

The camp is not all that big but is well laid out. I am in

a fibro-cement hut with about two dozen others. We have a bed with pillow and extra blanket, with a steel locker for our uniforms. The huts are lined and there is a little stove in the centre, so we are quite cosy. One of the chaps who has been here for seven months says it is a home away from home. So I am on a good station, and although I am a good way from home it's no use whingeing. Who would be a school teacher when there is a life like this available?

I have just come back from the mess, where we had soup, stew, potato, turnip, and apple pie and custard for tea. I got a surprise to find that the girls (WAAAF) eat in the same mess. They work in the hangars as fabric workers, parachute packers and general hands, as well as working as clerks, drivers, cooks, storemen and medical orderlies. Soon they will be here as flight riggers and mechanics. A fellow won't feel so smart after the war if a woman asks him what he did in the war and he replies, "I was a flight rigger", and she pipes up and says, "Oh, I was one of those too!"

4 March 1943

I started work today on late shift, which ends at 10.00 p.m. We get leave every night except Tuesday night, but it won't be much use going into Ballarat with so many Yanks around. There is weekend leave once a month, from Thursday afternoon until Tuesday morning, which gives the Victorians enough time to get home, but it will be no good to me.

With two others I have been put to work on the single-engined Wackett trainers, which are used for training wireless operators. There are also a few old "Aggies" (Avro Ansons). The CO's name is Fairbairn and they say his family owns the property on which the 'drome is built. I believe he is related to the Minister for Air, Mr J.V. Fairbairn, who was killed in that bad crash at Canberra a couple of years ago. The area around the 'drome is very flat with low hills and mountains in the distance, while around it on two sides are huge avenues of pine trees.

I suppose you will be interested to hear about my job, so here goes. I am on the flight line out on the 'drome and,

once the pilot has warmed up the engine, we have to walk at the wingtip to guide them for take-off. When he is well clear of other planes, he waves the rigger away from the wingtip, and when he returns you repeat the process back to the line. As there are usually about 15 planes up, you are kept busy, but after a day of it I was beginning to ask myself, "Is this what I've spent the last four months training for?"

When the day's flying was over, I found my name down to do a daily inspection on Wackett A3-72. This involves cleaning her all over with a rag, especially the oily spots under the belly, checking all the surfaces for cracks or holes in the fabric, inspecting the control hinges for damage or looseness, operating the flaps and sliding cockpit hood, checking the pilot's harness and generally making sure that everything is secure and works properly.

When you are certain, not just think she is OK, you sign that you have completed the "daily", and that she is ready to fly next morning. If anything goes wrong you are held responsible. I will watch very carefully tomorrow that A3-72 comes back safely from every flight! The pilots seem to be a very good lot and if you fix a kite up for them you stand a good chance of getting a flip. This will make me twice as careful I'm sure, seeing that I'll go west too if it crashes.

I thought you might be interested in the details of the Wackett trainers I'll be working on here. I got these from the Aircraft Recognition handbook I carry with me:

The Wackett is a single-engined, low wing monoplane of steel, plywood and fabric construction, designed by a Wing Commander Laurence Wackett, and manufactured at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fisherman's Bend, Melbourne, where the Wirraway is being made. It was intended as a training aircraft to bridge the gap between the simple Tiger Moth and the much more advanced Wirraway. The main dimensions are:

Wingspan: 37 feet (11.27 m)  
Length: 26 feet (7.92 m)  
Height: 10 feet (3.10 m)  
Weight: 2,617 lbs (1,187 kg)

It has a 165 hp, seven-cylinder Warner Scarab radial engine, which gives it a top speed of 120 mph (193 kph) and a cruising speed of 105 mph (170 kph). It has a fixed undercarriage with a tail wheel.

They stopped making it after 200 had been manufactured as it was not suitable for pilot training, because it is under-powered and the engine is unreliable due to overheating. So it is being used to give the poor old wireless operators practice in sending morse code while in the air.

They were using a couple of Douglas DC-2's, which the RAAF had taken over when they first started training them here, which would have been much more suitable. I guess they just had to find a use for the Wacketts.

#### 7 March 1943

On Saturday, a mate and I decided to see if Ballarat is rightly called "The Garden City". The main street has two rows of gardens down the centre, with lots of trees and very imposing statues, with fine old buildings down each side. We then caught a tram, which the locals call "Ballarat Buck-jumpers" because they have only two pairs of wheels under the centre, to the gardens around the shores of Lake Wendouree, on which there were hundreds of water birds. Kids were fishing along the shores. The gardens are well worth seeing, with well-kept lawns, colourful flower-beds of every colour, and shrubs and trees mainly of the English kind, like Armidale.

We had tea at the Australian Comforts Fund Hostel, sausages, chips, fruit salad and cream, and tea, all for a shilling. As my mate likes old-time dancing, we went to the city hall, where I thought the girls were the poorest dancers I've struck. They bounce around in the modern dances in a kind of cross between a foxtrot and jitterbug, probably due

to the Yank influence. We blame them for anything we don't agree with.

The moral tone of the city doesn't seem very high and almost everyone I saw in the street after 6.00 p.m., when the pubs closed, was drunk. There were Yank Marine Military Police on every corner. One Yank had smashed up a hotel and it's not safe for the girls to walk along the street the way they pester them.

Well, as the boys say when they want you to shut up, I'll "close the hangar doors" until next time.

### 11 March 1943

I am on early shift this week, which means getting up at 5.00 a.m. when it is still pitch dark, with an icy wind blowing across the 'drome when we get to the hangars. We first have to push all of the kites out of the hangar on to the tarmac to run up and test the engines.

The first time, one of the old hands shows you what to do, then you tell him what to do while he does it. The next time, you do it yourself while he watches for mistakes. Before you get into the cockpit, you have to drain some petrol from the sump in the bottom of the tank under the wing. This involves undoing some locking wire which stops the tap from accidentally turning, allowing about a cupful of petrol to run down over your hands and locking it again. The reason for this is to drain away any water, which is heavier than petrol, and could cost two lives, as well as the plane. By the time you get to the second row of kites, those in the front row are warming up. With the slipstream, the icy wind and petrol on your hands, you sure could do with a pair of gloves.

When in the cockpit, you have to park the wheel brakes to stop her from moving forward and make sure you have put chocks in front of the wheels. Then you have to set the throttle, mixture and propeller pitch levers in the correct position for starting. You then call, "All clear. Contact!", switch on the ignition, press the starter button and she should start — you hope!

You just sit there under the stars as dawn breaks, for

about 15 minutes, letting her tick over at about 1,200 rpm until she is warm enough to begin the tests. By this time you are almost warm yourself. First you open the throttle until she reaches 2,250 revs, test the propeller pitch change, test the number of revs dropped when she runs only on one of the two magnetos, then briefly open her up to take off revs before switching her off. I had the wind up the first time I did this, wondering what I would do if she jumped the chocks.

When we have finished all the run-ups it's about 6.30 a.m., so we wait in the pilots' hut for the pilots and WAG trainees to arrive. Then we strap them in and they take off, and are all in the air by 8.00 a.m. By this time we are pretty hungry and ready for breakfast. We go to dinner at 12 noon till 1.00 p.m. and go back to work till 2.00 p.m., when we knock off.

Today one of the Wacketts made a forced landing some distance away and I hoped I might be selected to go out in the salvage party, but it later flew back under its own steam. When I asked one of the NCOs what had caused the trouble, he said the pilot had landed because his wheels weren't turning in the air and this was causing extra drag, thus slowing the plane down. Of course, me being a "rookie" (new chum), he was pulling my leg, which they do a lot with the new boys. They send them to the store for a tin of striped paint or for a left-handed screwdriver!

### 19 March 1943

We have had a Wackett make a forced landing nearly every day this week, mostly with engine trouble. One was nearly 60 miles away and was flown back after a new engine had been taken out and installed. They all seem to be worn out and use a lot of oil. They are under-powered too, as they have a less powerful engine than the one they were designed for. I have just heard, on the little radio in our hut, about the DC-3 crash near Melbourne. I suppose seats will be easy to get on them now. The Spitfires must have torn into the Japs over Darwin. They'll think twice before they raid it again. I am enclosing a cutting from the paper for Dad, about the

good work being done by the "Spotters" [Volunteer Air Observers Corps, of which he was a member]. Isn't the war news great, with the Afrika Corps on the run in Tunisia, and more big raids on Germany.

I expect that any day now we will hear of an Allied landing in either Sicily or Italy, or even the coast of France.

We have some beaut arguments about our home states and cities. Of course, home is best wherever it is. I may as well tell you that I cannot get used to Victoria, and other boys feel the same, that it's like a foreign country in some ways. I wonder if the Vics in other states feel the same about them? I am beginning to feel that ground staff is a dead end, like being a foot-slogger in the Army.

22 March 1943

You may have heard on the wireless that two of our boys were killed in a crash today, about 20 miles away. The Wackett burnt and the RAAF ambulance went out and brought back the charred bodies. Later a RAAF tender brought back what was left of the plane. Hell, it was a mess, with the metal just a solid molten lump and the aluminium just powder to the touch. It brings it home to you when it happens so close. I hope they were dead or unconscious before the fire started.

The cause is unknown, but one pilot told me today that when the fitters dismantled the engine they found a broken valve. Another theory is that the pilot was wiping oil from his goggles when he lost control. The flight rigger and flight mechanic who did the "daily" on it the night before have to give evidence at the Court of Inquiry. All the planes were grounded after the accident and flying has stopped. It rattled a lot of the trainees and although it happens somewhere every day, this week it happened to us in Ballarat. The last crash here was on New Year's Day, when the same thing happened.

Sometimes, however, funny things happen. A WAG trainee was having a bit of bother with his wireless, so the pilot passed him a note saying, "Don't panic!" The WAG thought the message was to be transmitted, so he morsed

it back to base. I haven't heard what they said when they received it!

I hope to get to Melbourne on leave next weekend and will try for a billet.

29 March 1943

There were only about four of us who couldn't get home for the long weekend, so I ended up at Air Force House in Melbourne. I saw a newsreel of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, photographed from Beaufighter cockpits, and also of poor old "Bluey" Truscott. They were fortunate to recover his body for a decent burial. It's always the best pilots who have to go — "Cobber" Kane, Paddy Finucane and now our own "Bluey".

My billet was at Mentone, a bayside suburb about 45 minutes from Melbourne by train. It was a beautiful, big old home with views it would be hard to beat anywhere. I went with another chap who had been scrubbed from pilot training when he crashed a Tiger Moth, causing £50 damage.

I had a couple of feeds of grapes, as those big, oval, green ones are only fourpence a pound. All fruit there is sold by the pound, which is a bit of a problem, as you don't know how many pears or apples go to the pound. I bought you a RAAF badge, Mum, so hope you like it.

*Letter From Home 25 March 1943*

It was sad to hear of those two poor chaps meeting their end in that crash. You stay on the ground, as you are doing your bit and there are plenty around here who aren't. You be very careful of the propellers when the engines are running. There has been a big call-up here of the under-45s. Manpower is not calling up any more farmers or their hands, so some will be secure for a while. It is terrible that one farmer with a young family of seven and a wife was called up, while others miss out or get into protected industries. We had a good house party to raise money for the Australian Comforts Fund with about 13 carloads, and I left the best part of a pound there.



CA-6 Wackett trainer A3-200, the last of 200 built by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermans Bend, Victoria, on test flight over Melbourne.

Selwyn and Sid are back from the Middle East, with about 25,000 others, and Sid said that the Tommies have taken over. He was cashed up, with £35 in cash and £100 in deferred pay. We are giving him a Welcome Home tonight, which promises to be a big turn-out. He has 25 days leave and then goes to north Queensland to train for jungle warfare.

P.S. Be careful of the propellers when starting, as any slip would have you chopped to pieces in seconds. *Dad*

#### 4 April 1943

The weather is getting chilly, but the days are beautiful and ideal for flying. The old "Aggies" are night-flying and as I write I can hear one lumbering overhead. Since Thursday I have been refilling the kites with oil after each trip and boy, do they eat it up! Eighteen today used 50-55 gallons, so we are kept busy.

The meals have been on the nose lately, so I had a good meal at the ACF Hostel last night in Ballarat, then went to a small dance put on by the Younger Set. The girls were

classy and very friendly, so different from the city hall which attracts the Yanks. There were eight US Marine officers, as well as RAAF and Aussie Army officers there, so I felt a bit out of my class, but I enjoyed it and will go more often. I have been going to the pictures on the station and so far this week have seen *Bullets for O'Hara*, *Dive Bomber*, *What's Cookin'* and *The Men in Her Life*.

Thanks for the local papers. The Yanks seem to be a novelty in Kempsey, but they wouldn't be so keen on them if there was a camp of several thousand on their doorstep. All the same, they are doing a good job, but to hear some skite you'd think they were the only ones in the show, and even then only since 1942.

I have got to know a few of our pilots and they are a great lot — just what you'd imagine pilots to be — happy, don't-give-a-damn sorts of blokes.

#### 8 April 1943

Yesterday and today have been bitterly cold, and don't we notice it out on the 'drome! There was almost a crash yesterday when the engine of a kite cut out just as it was airborne, but the pilot got it down just inside the boundary fence. The pilot said to the WAG trainee as they got out, "You nearly got killed that time, mate!" It's a wonder they fly at all in this cloudy, showery and windy weather.

It's no fun getting up at 5.30 a.m. to find that the cooks got up only five minutes ahead of us and have nothing ready. We make those poor cows' lives a misery, the way we nag them. Who'd want to be a cook? Our Corporal was caught getting Air Force petrol for his car the other day and is now in the jug awaiting a court martial. They say he will get 90 days detention in Bendigo Military Prison, and lose his stripes. He was unlucky, as there must be thousands doing it and he always used to take a car load to Melbourne with him on long weekend leave. He used to dilute the petrol with kerosene.

I still have not given up hope of getting home on leave, but new regulations make it seem hardly worthwhile, with all the red tape. To get recreation leave and get a free rail

pass this is the procedure: Your application must be sent to the RTO (Rail Transport Office) in the relevant capital city, which decides what train you will travel on and informs your unit. Your leave is then approved, but you cannot leave until the train has been confirmed, so that you might get to Melbourne only to find that you can't get any further. You cannot travel interstate at all by paying your own fare, unless you have at least four days at home, and you get a free pass only once every three months. We are told that leave is a privilege, granted only "according to the exigencies of the Service" whatever that means.

13 April 1943

Yesterday I was fortunate to receive a bit more experience at Air Force expense. At about 10.30 a.m. a chap came out to me on the tarmac and said, "You are on a crash party; '69' is down, up near Bendigo." You should have seen the equipment we had to load on the tender and trailer: hundreds of yards of rope, block and tackle, 44-gallon drums, picks, shovels, spades, crowbars, axes, wire-cutters, wire-strainers, trestles to put the plane on, every kind of tool we could possibly need, and a dozen engine covers for shelter in case we had to stay the night. Then it was up to the Mess for food. There were about a dozen riggers and mechanics, with a Warrant Officer and a Flight Sergeant to supervise us, while the OC Maintenance went on ahead in a staff car.

We left here at 11.30 a.m. in the back of the tender with all the gear, and near the crash picked up a civvy at Maldon, who guided us out along a rough bush track, through open timber in hilly country. Before starting work we had dinner in a dry creek bed under a railway culvert, cooking tough steak on a piece of wire over an open fire. A few local farmers had arrived, and also the pilot and trainee were waiting. Fortunately they were not injured. The pilot had done a good job in putting her down in the only paddock free of trees, stumps and rocks for miles around.

One undercarriage leg was broken off, the wing was cracked right across and the prop was bent. We soon had

the tail assembly off, and removed the engine and the fuselage from the wing in drizzling rain, watched by a couple of school kids. One of the farmers had taken the crew off for tea at the farmhouse. It was dark by the time we had it all loaded and tied down, and we set off on the long drive back at 7.00 p.m. To pass the time we sang and told stories, finally arriving back here at 11.00 p.m, where the YWCA Officer had supper waiting for us, which was most welcome.

My leave is now up on the Leave Board, so with luck I should have eight days at home, so will wire you details of the train I'm on.

*Letter from Home* 30 April 1943

Sid's welcome home was a real bush dance, with plenty of musicians of a kind, and we gave him a £10 War Bond.

I got a most pleasant surprise on Tuesday, with a cheque for £14, 2 shillings and 8 pence as Government subsidy, which made my gross for the month £84, not bad for 44 acres. Orders for sweet potatoes still roll in and I get 18 shillings a bag for them. I miss your help feeding the cows when you were home, but your sister has come to the rescue. John needs a new tyre for his push bike, so I will have to get a form for approval to purchase it, as rubber is controlled.

The ban on cattle grazing on the roadside has been lifted, as all military traffic now goes by rail to conserve petrol and rubber, so the grazing cattle aren't such a hazard.

I heard that the lighthouse keeper at Smoky Cape saw the SS *Wollongbar* torpedoed, two simultaneous explosions and nothing was left. Only four crew were rescued and are in Port Macquarie Hospital. *Dad*

4 May 1943

Well, here I am back again down near the South Pole, after that beaut week at home. Since I returned there hasn't been a sunny day, and due to low cloud and mist, flying has been cancelled. One advantage of the wet weather has been that we have been able to pick buckets of mushrooms on the 'drome, which we grill on the pot-bellied stove in the hut.

Ballarat is still full of Yanks, and one rumour is that they are being acclimatised before going to the Aleutian Islands off Alaska! One chap on the troop train to Melbourne said that this is one state which, if the Japs invaded, he'd shake hands with Tojo and say, "You're welcome to it, mate!" He was a Queenslander. Apart from the climate, it isn't too bad here.

From tomorrow, I go back to refuelling the Wacketts, starting at 7.30 a.m. and finishing at 5.30 p.m. They are asking for applications for the conversion course to Fitter IIA, so I am applying, as they say you then have a better chance of a posting to an operational squadron up north.

16 May 1943

Now, here is something special. A Bell Airacobra fighter made a forced landing here today, flown by a RAAF Flight Lieutenant although it was a US job. She was carrying a loaded cannon which fires shells through the propeller shaft and has four 0.50 machine guns in the wings. Gee, they have a small cockpit, no bigger than a motor-cycle sidecar, and a door in the side like a car. She looked good sitting there on a tricycle undercarriage, which is the first time I've seen that set-up.

After fixing whatever was the problem, the pilot ran her up and had an audience of over 200. After taking off, he beat up the 'drome twice at about 150 feet, and stole the limelight completely from our poor old Wacketts. It makes me mad to think I could be working on them, instead of 90 mph Wacketts.

Good news tonight, with the fall of Tunis and Bizerta and the Spitfires' victory over Darwin, but tragic news of the sinking of the Centaur, with all those nurses and diggers lost. It makes you realise what we are up against. I called the lousy Japs some choice names when I heard about it. On the other hand, the blowing up of the Mohne and Eder Dams in Germany was terrible in a way, but will be a big blow to the Nazi war effort.

I have just come back from the station pictures, saw *Sun Valley Serenade*, in which Glen Miller plays "In The

Mood" and some other good tunes. I went to a dance at the Masonic Club on Saturday, but by 10.00 p.m. I'd had enough, as it was full of "Septics" [septic tanks], which some of the boys call the Yanks.

19 May 1943

Well, believe it or not, an hour ago I was 3,500 feet above terra firma; in other words, I have had my first flight in a Wackett. One of the pilots asked me if I'd like to go up with him for some aerobatics, so I said, "Too right!", grabbed a parachute and helmet and hopped aboard.

All went well until, at 3,500 feet, he started aerobatics. Until then it seemed pretty monotonous and I was wondering why pilots are always so anxious to fly. A few minutes later, after I had lost my dinner, I wondered even more. I just shut my eyes and was too scared to look where earth or sky were, as he dived, climbed, looped, did tight turns and slow rolls. After three lots of this I was sorry I had been so anxious to accept his offer.

Due to the harness I could not lean over the side to vomit, so there was a terrible mess in the cockpit. He made a good landing and after he had taxied in and parked the Wackett I had to get a bucket and rags and try to clean up the mess, as it was wanted for another flight soon after. I then went up to the hut to clean myself up.

Of course, I apologised to the pilot for putting up such a bad show and told him I hoped I had not cramped his style. My first flight in the RAAF lasted 45 minutes, and I won't be going up again in a hurry unless I am sure it's all straight and level.

*Letter From Home* 13 May 1943

I have to go to an important meeting of the Volunteer Air Observers Corps tomorrow night at the school, to be addressed by a Flight Lieutenant from HQ control. It's to do with observers spotting planes from their own homes and using their phone to put through the "Airflash" messages, which at present are often delayed getting through the local exchange. However, as only two homes have the phone on,

we will have to continue to use the special phone at the school.

One of our neighbours has just bought an old utility for his son so that they can get the extra petrol ration of 11 gallons a month. So, with the three vehicles in the family, they will get a total of 19 gallons a month compared to my lousy four gallons, 90% of which is used on the farm. Another chap has converted an old car into a utility just so that he can use the extra ration to go to dances and to town. Can you beat it? *Dad*

What good news from Tunisia and the end of the war in North Africa! I suppose the invasion of Europe will be next. Poor Keith Truscott has paid the supreme sacrifice. They are the most gallant men, I think, as the odds are against them.

Lloyd is home on leave and looks fine in his officer's uniform. He has high praise for the ground staff. *Mum*

26 May 1943

I had a good time on leave in Melbourne and saw a few pictures, including *The First of the Few*, which is the story of Mitchell, the designer of the Spitfire, which you can bet I enjoyed. I also saw *The Maltese Falcon*, a thriller, and *Hellzapoppin'*, which was a comedy with Abbott and Costello.

On Sunday afternoon I went to a dance at the Powerhouse where the US Marines Orchestra was playing and boy, were they any good? Definitely the best live band I've heard. The jitterbugs really went to town and one Yank and his girl put on a terrific exhibition which almost stopped the show.

I am still up in the air about my flight, and will never forget the sensation of diving at 120 mph and the weightless feeling at the top of the climb. I'd like to do it again for that, but can't imagine how pilots dive at 400 mph and still know what they are doing.

Well, guess what? I have been posted back to No.1 Engineering School at Ascot Vale for the conversion course to Fitter IIA (Airframe Fitter). It lasts ten weeks and I have

to report there tomorrow, with a Sydney mate who is also posted, so will have to get busy with my clearances from here.

So, I am back in Melbourne, and after that, who knows what?

*Ode to a young aviator*

A young aviator lay dying at the end of a bright summer's day,  
His comrades had gathered around him to carry his remains away.  
His Anson was piled on his wishbone, his Vickers was wrapped around his head,  
He wore a spark plug on his elbow — it was plain he would shortly be dead.  
He spat out a valve and a gasket and stirred in the sump where he lay  
And then to his wondering comrades these brave parting words he did say:  
Take the cylinder out of my kidney, the connecting rod out of my brain,  
From the small of my back take the crankshaft and assemble the motor again.  
Take the piston ring out of my liver, the turnbuckle out of my ear,  
Remove from my backbone the rudder, there's all of your aeroplane here.  
I'll be riding a cloud in the morning, with no Cheetahs beside me to cuss,  
Take the lead from your feet and get moving, there's another lad needing this bus.

*Anon* (One version of many of this oft-told tale)

## CHAPTER SIX

# *The lights are on again in Melbourne*

Letters from No.1 Engineering School, Ascot Vale,  
Victoria

28 May 1943

I arrived here at 1.30 p.m. yesterday and, after the usual red tape and clearing-in procedures, walked down to No.3 Wing of the School at Flemington Racecourse a mile away, filled my palliasse with straw and found the tent to which I have been allocated.

Living conditions are primitive after the comparative luxury of Ballarat. The tents are A-style army tents with a fly and wooden pallets for the floor, only four inches above the gravel of the Members' Car Park. With six palliasses spread out on the floor, there is hardly room to put a foot between them. So if you want to get up during the night you have to avoid treading on your mate's face. From a wire strung between the poles hang six blue and six drab uniforms, six greatcoats and six wet towels. A lantern provides extraordinary light and shadow effects at night. As the sun doesn't rise until 7.30 a.m, you can imagine what it's



*Six-man tents in Member's Car Park, Flemington Racecourse, (where author spent winter 1943), took overflow from the showgrounds.*

like in the morning, all getting dressed in the dark and making our "beds". The lucky ones are those in the grandstand in double-deck bunks.

Reveille is at 5.10 a.m., breakfast is from 5.30 until 6.10 a.m., and we go on parade at 6.30 a.m. Lectures begin up at the showgrounds at 7.00 a.m., and dinner (lunch) is at 10.15. As we have to march back to the racecourse for meals, it is a bit of a rush. After lectures finish at 3.15 p.m. we have 15 minutes of PT [Physical Training]. It's nothing to wait in a long queue for 35 minutes for a meal, but so far they aren't too bad.

The discipline is strict after being on a Station and the "Spitfires", as we call the SPs [Service Police], are constantly patrolling the grounds to see that we are clean-shaven, properly dressed in clean overalls with no buttons missing and buttoned up to the neck, and don't need a haircut or shave, all of which gets our backs up.

There are six phases to the course: basic fitting, theory of flight, hydraulics, splicing, metal repairs and aircraft

maintenance. Our first practical job is to make a 3/4-7/8 inch spanner out of spring steel, and boy, is it hard — no chance of filing off too much!

31 May 1943

On Saturday I went with a cobbler to a dance at the Railway Institute in Flinders Street Station building, and for the first time saw The Alberts being danced. Two girls were knocked out when they collided whilst dancing!

We didn't feel like staying in camp on Sunday, so went into the city, but were faced with the problem of somewhere to spend the day. This problem of there being no Sunday entertainment for servicemen is no myth, so we went to the Hospitality Bureau, where the lady on duty suggested a private home for the evening. We ended up at a very nice home in Box Hill, an outer suburb. With an AIF commando chap and two RAAF boys, we had a wonderful tea. Never have I seen such a variety of cake and cakes, not even at the dances at home. It was a sight for hungry eyes and they made us eat and eat. We returned to camp at midnight with an invitation to come again. Gee, you can't beat the Melbourne people for hospitality.

The course is going OK and so far is mainly a revision of the Riggers' course. We have the first two courses of WAAAF Flight Riggers here now and the boys are having to watch their language while they are around.

On Saturday I saw one of our new little fighters being test flown from here (the Boomerang). He put on a great show of aerobatics over the Bay and the way they can climb and dive is remarkable, over a thousand feet straight up. They are just beautiful to watch and the boys say they are the goods.

Thanks for knitting the mittens and pullover, Mona. I am enclosing £1 for you to buy yourself something in return. There was another big bundle of mail from home today and I picked up the fruit cake from the post office. The butter ration must be hard on you, as half a pound a week doesn't go very far, and most of the boys say it will be hard on their people.



*WAAAF march past saluting base, No.1 Engineering School, with a smart "eyes right" to the Commanding Officer.*

The weather here at present is all over the place — cloudy, mild, sunny, cold, windy and showery, all one after the other, often on the same day. Every night when I make my "bed", I try to work out how to get another thickness out of my four blankets.

Some of the fellows on the course have had a few hours in the air and one has been in the raids on Darwin and was at Milne Bay when the Japs had a go at it. I would go up again if given the chance, but no aerobatics next time, thanks. When you consider the thousands of hours flown each week at dozens of flying training schools there aren't that many accidents.

11 June 1943

You should see the work that goes on here as they prepare for the races once a month. They make everything spotlessly clean, including the patterned, tiled floors, and mow the

lawns and weed the garden beds. Despite rationing I have seen lorry loads of beer and soft drink, as well as food, being delivered.

Yesterday the canteen had some small pineapples in at ninepence each, so I bought one just for the novelty, although we get a fair bit of fruit. Butter is rationed. We get none for dinner and only small amounts for other meals. The cake you sent is one of the best yet, according to my cobbers.

I wish you could drop in on us some evening to see us "at home". We just roll out our palliasses on the floor and lie down, reading or yarning about what we used to do as kids — making our own toys, pinching fruit, swimming in the creek, droving cattle, shooting rabbits or 'roos, as well as going on with a lot of nonsense, like making flowery speeches.

As you must wonder who my tent-mates are and where they come from, I'll give you the "G-G" [good guts] on each of them. Ray Hamilton, who is my cobber, comes from Hurlstone Park in Sydney and used to work at AWA Wireless. Harry Chapman comes from a sheep station north of and inland from Perth and has done a lot of 'roo shooting. Opposite is Harry Romero ["Caesar" after the film actor] who is an older chap and a dry old stick and comes from Ashfield in Sydney. He has had a variety of jobs and is a real hard case. Then there is John Sparling, an unknown quantity, who is about 19 and came from England when he was 12. He was on a Boys' Farm in Western Australia when he enlisted. Last is Joe Richards from Melbourne about whom I know very little as he goes home a lot. Oh, and there is me, Les Sullivan, aged 18 who, in case you have forgotten, grew up on a dairy farm near Kempsey and was a school teacher for a week before he enlisted.

We have finished the first phase of the course and I came just about top, with a 78% average and got 81% for the spanner, so you can bet it will fit the nuts neatly. We are now in theory of flight, where we learn about the Wirraway, Kittyhawk and Beaufort. I like the theory and as I have a good memory and have had more practice than the others at exams, there is no excuse if I don't do well.



*Presentation of an ambulance purchased with money raised by trainees at 1 ES, c. 1944.*



*Trainees march from main arena parade ground to lecturers. Airman nearest camera in great coat is probably a Queenslander!*



*A mid-winter parade on the Showgrounds Main Arena.*

I have been buying morning and afternoon papers in anticipation of invasion news in Europe, but it is all quiet apart from a landing on Pantellaria. Newspaper boys come right through the camp, even into the toilets in case they miss someone.

#### 21 June 1943

I went to the races here on Saturday and saw the last two. Then, in spite of it being a bitterly cold night, I went to a dance at the Caulfield Town Hall, which is one of the many town hall dances in the suburbs. As I was having a good time I stayed until the end. Due to the poor tram services after midnight I arrived back at camp at 2.30 a.m. To avoid the main gate guards I got off the tram at the end of the main straight and walked down the racetrack where the Melbourne Cup is run. Fares are doubled after midnight and as there is no servicemen concession I had to pay the full fare of eightpence. Gee, I think they are mean.

During the week we seldom go outside the tent after

dark and we are usually in bed by 8.00 p.m. As it's too cold to walk to the latrines we usually use one of the trees in the car park. On parade this morning the CO, who is an old Scot named Moffat-Pender, went crook on us for this. He said, "There is considerable indiscriminate use of miscellaneous trees and posts for the purpose of urinating. This disgusting and unhygienic practice is to cease forthwith." As he said this his small Scots Terrier, which he brings on parade with him, lifted its leg and peed against the flagpole. You should have heard the boys roar with laughter, as he didn't know what was going on behind his back.

#### 25 June 1943

On Wednesday night I went to the flicks in town with a nice girl I met at a dance at the Collingwood Town Hall. I was invited out to her home in Fitzroy on Sunday and was well looked after. So you will be pleased to know that at last I have somewhere to go on leave.

I suppose you will want to know all about her. She is 17 and, I think, is C of E [Church of England], and her name is Peggy. She is a good dancer and lives with her parents who own two small shops. She has an older sister, and a brother in the RAAF. She doesn't like Yanks. It is nothing serious, simply someone to go out with and a home to go to at weekends. As you know, I was sick of trying to find places to spend weekend leave.

Yesterday my mate Ray was feeling a bit lonely and went to a private home for tea. He hasn't been married very long and misses home life. He will miss my company now as we used to go everywhere together. I have just returned from town where I had tea at the Presbyterian Church Hut in Collins Street, which serves plain, but well-cooked, meals such as shepherd's pie for one shilling. Fruit is very dear here. I bought some bananas at twopence each and paid eightpence for three pears, which are sold by the pound.

You need not worry about me not being able to go to church as we have a compulsory church parade every Friday, and once a fortnight have a half-hour service in the picture theatre.

In the theory of flight exam I got 73% and am now on hydraulics, which involves learning the operation of the retractable undercarriage, flaps, bomb doors and brake systems of the Wirraway, Lockheed Hudson, Fairey Battle, Bristol Beaufort, and a P-40 Kittyhawk. It is very interesting finding out how they operate and all are very different, depending on where they were made. The Beaufort alone has 38 components, so it would be easy to get them all beautifully mixed up when it comes to the exam.

The newspapers have run out of words to describe the tremendous raids on Germany. How is Curtin's form, giving in to an election now? The fighting in Canberra is worse than the fighting up north.

1 July 1943

I am writing this in the YMCA room and had a job to find a space as there are over a hundred boys here, all writing letters. It is too cold to write in the tents. Thanks for the welcome papers, particularly the *Smith's Weekly*, which is always passed around as it has a lot of good reading.

Today we were issued with our 25 clothing ration coupons for the next 12 months and we also were issued with a tea and a butter coupon and half a sugar coupon as a weekend allowance. I will give them to Peggy's mother, who has been good to me.

We have been living on tinned food lately and here is a typical menu:

Breakfast — tinned porridge, tinned bacon, tinned sausages and powdered egg.

Dinner — tinned beef, dehydrated potato, tinned peas and tinned pudding.

Tea — tinned fish and tinned tomatoes.

It doesn't seem to have affected my appetite as I now weigh 10 stone 13 pounds.

The beautiful big Lancaster bomber flew low over the showgrounds this morning. She is a beautiful looking machine and it's hard to realise that we have now seen some of the best planes in the world, something we could never have dreamed of before the war.

Letter From Home 6 July 1943

I am writing this at the Air Observers' Post at Clybucca School. We were pleased to hear that your girl friend is so nice and her people in good circumstances. As you say, one wanders about aimlessly when there is nothing definite to do.

Good luck with your friendship even if, under the circumstances, it is only temporary. Who knows, it may grow to be permanent and of a more serious nature.

I have been listening in to speeches by members of the New Zealand Parliament in their budget debate from 1 YA Wellington. I think Australia is heading the same way as their Labour government, with severe inflation. There is no doubt they are interesting and educational to listen to.

I have renovated your old bike for Mona to ride so she can "spot" with me. It needs a new rim but they are unobtainable, like all spare parts. She spotted eight planes today, one a Liberator, as the "birds" were active on the wing, migrating north.

Two of our heifers are missing from the bush paddock. I reported it to the local detective, who said cattle duffing is rife. He has recovered 38 so far this year. We can't get out there to check, with the petrol ration only four gallons a month. *Dad*

9 July 1943

It is bitterly cold tonight and there will be a frost in the morning, for sure — not the best weather for sleeping on the ground in a tent. Outside, the place is like the Kokoda Trail with mud, after three wet days.

There was a big crowd of Yanks in the city last weekend for their 4th of July celebrations. They were everywhere and packed all the pubs, mostly Army and Navy but the US Marines still predominate.

Melbourne is beginning to change now that the brownout has been lifted. Street corners, which you could not see from the other side, are now floodlit by comparison. From the suburbs, the city is a sea of light and there is a big glow in the sky over it.

It is tough on the Yanks, who used to get up to all sorts of things in the doorways with their girlfriends, and you hear some pretty sordid stories of the way they treat our girls. On Saturday I went to a relative's home with Peggy and there was a digger there on compassionate leave from the fighting at Mubo in New Guinea. Someone asked him what he thought of the Yanks up there and he said, "Don't talk to me about the Yanks. They are all right back in Moresby where they can go to a show every night. Fair dinkum, they are doing a better job down here in Bourke Street."

However, we could not win the war without their material and weapons, don't you agree?

I am getting to know Melbourne pretty well, but this time when I leave I hope it's for good. In my time here I've had my eyes opened to a lot of things and have had to change a lot of ideas. It has all been good experience and I have a wiser head, which will be all to the good when things get back to normal.

There was a great newsreel in camp last night of the capture of Tunis with frontline shots of Nazis and Eyties surrendering to British troops. People were going mad with joy, which gives you a nice feeling to see us in a victory for a change. Gee, didn't the Spitfires have a great victory over Darwin against the Zeroes. That's where I'd love to be posted after this course. Don't worry about me being posted to the Islands as we have to go wherever we are posted and I don't mind where it is.

16 July 1943

There were races here again last Saturday, the main event being the Grand National Steeplechase, and there was a big crowd. I went into the city by train after the last race and I have never seen such crowds trying to board the trains. As the mob surged forward you could hear windows smashing. Amazingly, no one was injured.

I have got into a pretty slick routine here in the mornings. I get up at 6.40 a.m. when it is still pitch dark, make my bed, which involves folding my pyjamas, blankets,

rug and palliasse. Then a quick sprint to the showers, which are a bit of a joke, as you have to pull on a lever with one hand while soaping yourself in the trickle of water, which is often cold as the boiler attendant is too lazy to get up and stoke the fire. Breakfast takes 15 minutes. Another sprint back to the tent for a final tidy up around my six inches of bed space and on to the parade ground at 7.20 a.m. It's amazing what you can do when you have to!

We are fed up with the senseless discipline here, and at times it wouldn't take too much more to make the boys mutiny. There is one particularly nasty DI [Drill Instructor] we have nick-named "The Boy B—d". The CO is old and childish and the place is rotten with red tape or "bull—t" as we call it. In fact we call the headquarters building "Bull—t Castle".

Yesterday we had to parade in our best blue uniform for over an hour at lunch time. Then, at 4.30 p.m., there was another "blues parade", on a closed camp night when all we can do is get undressed again! It began to rain, so all the boys just walked off and beat the Sergeant to the main gate before he could close it on us. Then we were supposed to stand by our beds at 6.15 p.m. for an inspection, but at 6.15



*Morning roll-call parade in car park, Flemington Racecourse. Book-makers' stands at rear.*

the fire bell rang. We had to stand outside our tents in the rain and cold, then were marched around for ten minutes before finally being dismissed. The CO died a thousand horrible deaths in our minds.

One of the boys wanted special leave to harvest his fruit crop and the silly old coot said to him, "Do you think my little dog would mind if you went on leave?" We are his own private little Air Force to do as he likes with.

Well, the big event we have been expecting for months has happened at last — the invasion of Sicily — and I have been buying the morning and afternoon papers to follow it. Most of the boys are now taking an interest in the news.

I got my Hydraulics marks the other day and scored 91% and was fourth on the course.

### 22 July 1943

We have been having some warmer days for a change. I have only seen two frosts here, but it is the constant cloud that makes Melbourne so miserable. The weather changes constantly and the average sunshine per day for July has been four hours. I am counting the days till the end of the course.

Ray and I went into town for a meal at the Dug-out and then to two newsreel theatres. Tomorrow it will be the dance at the Caulfield Town Hall and then on Sunday I have an invitation to tea with Peggy's parents, which will mean a late night trudge back to camp.

We have been having compulsory picture parades in camp and so far we have seen *Battle of Britain*, *Next of Kin*, *In Which We Serve*, and one about the battle for Malta. Everyone should see *In Which We Serve* so that they know just what the boys in the Royal Navy have to face. As it is a British film it is very realistic, unlike the artificial Yank shows.

I managed to get a quarter pound block of Nestle's chocolate at the canteen, as I found that by going just before we are paid, when most of the boys are broke, there is no queue.

Well, Mussolini is history now, and no doubt in the

future, when I am back teaching, I will have to explain who he was and what he did. Nonetheless, I think the war will go on for another two years at least before we finish off Germany and can then turn to Japan.

I got only 61% in the Splicing exam — the less said the better — so don't ask me to splice the cows' leg ropes when I come home on leave. We are now on Metal Repairs, which is going much better as we have to practice on a Lockheed Hudson, using nine different methods of patching holes.

### 10 August 1943

Thanks for all the welcome mail and the socks, which will be very handy as we wear them out quickly. I had to stop there as the lantern had run out of kero and had to borrow some from the next tent! I am sitting on my palliasse writing this and the straw is like powder after ten weeks. We have a superstition that if you put new straw in it you will get a crook posting, so I am not going to tempt fate.

I got 82% for "metal-bashing" giving me a course average of 77%, so I will be flat out to reach my goal of 80% average. Next week we will be assembling planes built up from crashes, including some of the crack defenders of Darwin. The two courses of WAAAF flight riggers are doing very well on the course. I saw two WAAAF flight mechanics working on an engine the other day and said to them, "Oh, grease monkeys" and one replied, "Well, at least we are enjoying ourselves!"

It will be hard to realise that when I have finished this course I will have gone as far as I can in ground staff and that my pay will be equal to an army sergeant's, as the RAAF trade standards are very high. So it's a big step up for me. At least I no longer feel that I am a "rookie" or "sprog". I have been in now for ten months, which is nothing when some have been overseas for three years.

At last we are having some warmer sunny days, so spring can't be too far away.

The cake, Mum, is a real beaut and very nice to have when I come in late at night feeling hungry. I have shown the photos of the farm you sent and the boys in the tent were

very interested. I suppose if you were to leave it, it would all be just a memory. Going home on leave would not be the same.

So, Dad, you saw the Yanks in action when you were down in Newcastle. At Ballarat we often sat in the street, betting whether they would be able to "pick up" a particular pair of girls. We reckoned we could tell which ones would stop to talk or go off with them. Nine out of ten Aussies would never go out with a girl who had been out with a Yank on principle. They had only been in the war six months and were wearing a row of medals, whereas our boys aren't permitted to wear medal ribbons until after the war, even though many of them have seen three years of overseas service. One story going around here is that a Yank said to a Digger, "You don't like the way we take the girls away from you, do you, Aussie?" to which the Digger casually replied, "Oh, no, Yank, we really appreciate you sorting them out for us."

19 August 1943

Well, I have finished No.114 Fitter IIA Course and am now in "pool" awaiting a posting, which can't come too soon as we have all had a bellyful of this place. I could be posted to any one of the 30 RAAF Stations in NSW, but it all rests in the hands of the "shiny-bums" here. I am on night duty at the fire station, which involves patrolling the grounds in two-hour shifts and turning a key in each of the eight fire alarms at seven and a half minute intervals. As I write the Station band is playing on the parade ground on the arena and it sounds just like it must during the Grand Parade at showtime.

I got 83% for Aircraft Maintenance which gave me a course average of 78% so was 2% under my goal, but I am reasonably happy with that. My pay book looks good, with eleven shillings and sixpence a day in it now and if I draw four shillings it should be enough to live on. Since joining up, I've been paid a total of £132 and have sent you half of that to bank for me.

On Friday, Ray got word that he was to be initiated

into a Lodge in Sydney. As we have finished training he got leave from the CO, who I think might be a Mason. I loaned him all my spare money as he didn't have his fare home because he allots nearly all his pay to his wife.

About leaving the farm, I agree with Mum that it is a big risk in these uncertain times. I hope Dad doesn't rush into buying that shop at Waratah, because if it doesn't work out and you have sold the farm you will have nothing to fall back on. So think it over carefully, Dad.

23 August 1943

As you will know from my telegram, I have been posted up among the bananas and sugar cane, to No.3 Wireless Air Gunners School at Maryborough in Queensland. I would have much preferred an operational station further north and will be working on Wacketts again. However, as I have always wanted to see Queensland I can now do it at government expense. A chap who has been there said conditions aren't too good, but the station is near the town, which is a fair size. It will be a long 1,400 miles journey and I will be travelling on my 19th birthday, which will be a new experience. My mate, Ray, has been posted to Parkes so our 12-months' partnership has been broken up.

Labour romped home in the elections, as I thought they would, so the majority of people must have confidence in Curtin. I could not vote, as it is only given to under-21s who have been outside the three mile limit.

There was an unusual sight in the sky over Melbourne yesterday when a high-flying kite left a vapour trail, about 20,000 feet up according to the paper. I will leave you to guess what caused it.

*Later:* We leave on the 1.30 p.m. troop train on Saturday 28th, so will wire you from Sydney at what time I expect to pass through Kempsey. I will sign off here from Melbourne for the last time, I hope.

P.S. I am not looking forward to saying goodbye to Peggy as I suppose there will be a few tears.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Say buddy, what field is this?*

#### Letters from No.3 Wireless Air Gunners School, Maryborough, Queensland

While I was very happy to be leaving Melbourne's cold, grey winter for the warm sunshine of tropical Queensland, I was disappointed that I would not be working on more modern aircraft in an operational area further to the north. I would again be servicing the same Wackett Trainers as I had at No.1 WAGS, Ballarat.

When I had to spend my first week at No.3 Wireless Air Gunners School (3 WAGS) confined to barracks, I felt that fate and the postings wallahs at Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne had conspired against me. Maryborough did, however, have its compensations, as I was to discover.

While it was not an operational station, because of its position on the flight path from Brisbane to the operational areas further north, it was a haven for United States Army Air Force (USAAF) aircraft when the fierce tropical electrical storms closed in and the Yanks, reputedly not the world's best navigators and in a country where landmarks were few, literally "dropped in". Invariably their first

question on sliding back the canopy on a fighter or dropping from the hatch of a bomber was, "Say buddy, what field is this?" followed by, if they were flying south, "How far is it to Bris-BANE?"

It was thrilling for me to be involved in the marshalling in and refuelling of their most modern aircraft, followed by the inevitable "shoot up" of the airfield on departure. In addition, when I arrived there in September 1943, the runway still had obstacles placed on it when flying ceased for the day to prevent a surprise landing by the Japanese, an aftermath of the Battle of the Coral Sea some 15 months earlier. So it was no surprise to find that our letters were being censored and I could not write freely about what I was doing. Our Salvation Army-supplied writing paper carried a warning that reference to military matters would result in letters being delayed or mutilated. So I began to keep a diary in which I could record events that I could not mention in my letters.

Another compensation was that the beaches of Hervey Bay were only an hour or so away by train, so that leave was not the problem it had been in Melbourne. I soon realised that by being a teetotaller up until now, I was missing out on some of the comradeship and experiences which seemed to be enjoyed by my mates. Beer was severely rationed and although the hotels remained open until 8.00 p.m. there was not much scope for getting into strife. My first tentative efforts in this direction involved such exotic concoctions as advocaat and cherry brandy, creme de menthe and soda, and gin squash.

Finally, I entertained the hope that this would also be a short posting of perhaps not more than six months, following which I would be on my way to where the action was in the islands north of Australia.

#### 30 August 1943

I had a long and very tiring trip up here with only eight hours sleep in three days. We left Melbourne at 1.30 p.m. on Friday 27th and, after the usual change of trains at Albury, arrived at Central, Sydney at 9.30 a.m. on Saturday on the

leave train. After only an hour we were on our way again. Seeing you for 20 minutes at Kempsey at 11 p.m. now seems like a dream, except for the birthday cake you gave me, which is a beauty and the best present I could have wished for.

We arrived at South Brisbane at 11.30 a.m. on Sunday 29th. As we had the rest of the day in Brisbane I had time for a look around the city and here are some impressions. It is very hilly and looks like a big country town. All the houses are up high on piles for coolness and almost all are built of timber with a tin chimney for the kitchen stuck on the side. There were Yanks of the three services everywhere and lots of brick air-raid shelters in the streets, with large water pipes in the gutters with hydrants for fire fighting in the event of a raid.

We pulled out of Roma Street Station, which is the terminus for country trains, at 9.30 p.m. on Sunday and arrived at Maryborough at 5.45 a.m., tired and dirty as you can imagine. Arthur Waldock, who was posted here with me, suggested we go out to his mother's flat for breakfast and a change of clothes before reporting to 3 WAGS. After lunch we caught a taxi and on arriving at the guard room were told we were under "open arrest" for being five and a half hours AWL [Absent Without Leave] and would be charged next day. This stunned me but we were apparently supposed to come out on the tender which met the train, but which had left the station by the time we dragged ourselves off the train with all our gear.

So we had to report to the guard room at hourly intervals which made me feel like a criminal and I went up before the Adjutant on my first "fizzer" this morning and we each got seven days CB [Confinement to Barracks]. If it had been six hours AWL we would have got 14 days CB and been docked a day's pay, so I will know better next time and can assure you it won't happen again! There doesn't seem to be much point in good behaviour if this can happen quite unintentionally. It will be a week or more before I can tell you what Maryborough is like.

Apart from that, the weather is a nice change from

Melbourne and although we are sleeping on palliasses on the floor, the showers and mess are handy and we get two days leave once a month. I think I am going to like Queensland.

3 September 1943

Well, the war has been going four years today and I can remember 3.9.39 very clearly as I was just getting over the measles and wondered how long the war would last, hoping it would go on long enough for me to be in it. Now we wonder how much longer it will go on.

I have settled down to my stretch of CB and have learned that you are not considered "one of the boys" unless you have been on a "fizzer". The extra duties have included guard duty from 7.30 – 9.30 p.m. and 1.30 – 3.30 a.m., duty crew on the aerodrome and some "spud-barbering" in the mess for which, fortunately, we were given a potato peeler.

I have already met a couple of the boys I was at teachers' college with who are doing their Wireless Operator Course here before they go on to Evans Head for Air Gunner training. So the college is well represented in the war. When I am asked why I am not in aircrew I have to say that my parents won't let me change, but now that I know I get airsick it is probably just as well.

I can't buy writing paper or envelopes anywhere so please send me some if you want to get letters. Don't ask me when I will get home leave as all leave has been cancelled, due, I believe, to a shortage of coal for the trains.

13 September 1943

I have some good news — we can apply for leave again, so I have applied for eight days recreation leave and two days travelling time from 27 October to 9 November, so hope you have not moved before then as I want one last look at the farm, as I did not realise you were really serious about leaving it.

I went into town for the first time to check out the social scene but, with only eight couples at the town hall dance, gave it away. Maryborough is bigger than I imagined



# Lancaster Bomber

Australian Tour.

## FIRST VICTORY LOAN

MARCH - APRIL, 1944

AUTOGRAPHS OF CREW.

*Peter Swanson*

*Ed Coppley*

*W. Lewis*  
*Harry Neill*

*Don Delaney*

with about 16,000 people. There are some lovely homes with beautiful gardens full of palms and masses of bougainvillea in flower. The pubs are all open until 8 p.m. or while the beer lasts and there is a lot of after hours trading, I hear. The boys say that if you don't drink here there is nothing else to do at night, so it looks as though I will be spending a lot of time in camp.

Isn't the war news great? We are now living in history-making times with eventful days and no end to the surprises each day brings. What a great sight it must have been to see the Italian fleet steam into Malta to surrender after three years of trying to nail it.

17 September 1943

The RAAF has a leave house at Hervey Bay, or "The Bay" as the locals call it, at which the various sections can stay for long weekend leave, so I decided to visit The Bay last Sunday. The return train fare was two shillings and sixpence and the train a very antique affair and, on the narrow gauge line, looked like a toy. It took two hours to cover the 20 miles, calling at four stations around The Bay — Pialba, Scarness, Torquay and Urangan, only Pialba being of any size. I got off at Scarness and found that the beach was very narrow with no surf and so flat that the difference between tides is over 250 yards. I enjoyed lying in the sun trying to get some colour on my skin after nine months in sunless Victoria.

When we returned to Maryborough a mate and I went to the pictures, something we could not do in the "Wowser State" on Sunday. We saw *Star-spangled Rhythm*, and *Orchestra Wives* featuring the Glen Miller band which I enjoyed.

Sorry Dad, that I forgot Father's Day so I am sending you £5, and ten shillings each for Alan and John. I am "earning" now, if that is the word, more than ever you did, so it's the least I can do in return. Did you read the report on the good work the Volunteer Air Observer Corps is doing? Stunting pilots will now have to watch out.

I don't think that could have been Mrs Roosevelt's

plane you saw fly over as she was travelling in a (CENSORED). One of our boys saw it in Brisbane and said (CENSORED).

22 September 1943

I am leading a great life at present on the fire crew all day, waiting for something to happen and hoping it doesn't, although it almost did today, which I will tell you about when I come home on leave, as well as some other experiences I've had.

[*Diary:* A twin-engined DH-84 Dragon ground-looped when caught by a gust of wind as it was landing and landed heavily, tearing off the undercarriage and one engine, which caught fire. We raced to the scene in the fire tender and began to hose the wreckage with foam just as the pilot and three trainee WAGs scrambled to safety. We hacked off the wing with a fire axe and stopped the fire from spreading to the fuselage. I was soaked with foam and had to receive attention from the medical section for acid burns from the foam mixture.]

I went to the C of E dance last night but most of the girls are jitterbug mad and couldn't follow my dancing. There are quite a few Yanks here, the forerunners of many they say, so it will be spoiled for us, just as Ballarat was. I miss my old mate Ray, as anyone I go out with here usually ends up saying, "Come in for a drink?" and, to avoid having to refuse, it is better to be alone. Not all of the boys drink and I don't want to start because I've seen too much of it and its effects. I'm not a wowser but it has no appeal for me.

4 October 1943

We are not supposed to post our letters in town so that they can be censored, but nearly everyone does as it's the only way to catch the mail. Yes, I still write to Peggy as it means another letter each week, but I have no plans to see her again, because of the distance.

It's just a year since my first week of teaching at Tallawudjah and nearing the end of my first year in the Service. The glamour has well and truly worn off it now,

though, and it is just a job to be done. I get a bit fed up with camp life and the food and living conditions, but there are lot worse off than I am.

At the weekend a young corporal in our hut asked me to join him on a visit to his uncle's place at a little town called Gundiah, about 30 miles down the line. We were supposed to catch a timber lorry but as there were none about we caught a taxi to the main line junction at Baddow. When a goods train came along at 6.00 p.m. we asked the guard if we could travel on it but he said there was no accommodation on it. So we walked along to the locomotive and put our case to the driver, who was sympathetic. Just as the train began to move he said "Hop up", so we rode down to Gundiah on the footplate, something I would never have been able to do in civvy life.

It was a Yank engine, imported under Lend Lease, and was much more modern than the Queensland engines, but the driver said they were slap-up jobs and not well laid out. It took three and half hours to cover 30 miles as we had to stop often to let other traffic through. We had to stand and as we were in our drab uniforms everything was covered in soot and grit.

After a clean-up we got to the local hall just as a concert was finishing, but dancing went on until 2 a.m., which was really 3 a.m. as it was the start of daylight saving. After a lovely roast duck dinner we walked over the range to a sugar mill and next morning caught the 3.45 a.m. mail train back to Maryborough. The daughter of the house was a 16-year-old who sometimes gave her name to Yanks passing through on troop trains, as a pen-friend. One wrote back to her saying that if she went out with him he'd spend his last cent on her and take her back to the States with him. Some silly girls fall for that line.

13 October 1943

I have just spent my first week in the RAAF leave home at The Bay with eight others. In peacetime it was the Far West Childrens' Rest Home where they could have a seaside holiday. It cost us only one shilling for the weekend. We



*Jack Neuhaus and Ted Hancock with Maryborough friends at Torquay, Queensland.*



*Hutmates: Cec Seeny, Johnny Hind, Jim Harris (rear), Bert Bartlem, Dick Marsh, author (front), 3 WAGS, Maryborough, Queensland.*

have to bring our own blankets but the mess supplies a cook and the food, which is mostly tinned stuff. The four miles of road from Pialba to Urangan are lined with weekenders, flats and boarding houses, with clusters at each little township. The home is a large wooden building with accommodation for about 24 and I was lucky to get a room and bed to myself.

On Saturday night I went to a dance in the local hall. There was only a pianist but the floor was extra good, the girls were plentiful, beautiful and friendly and although it was mostly old-time, I had a good night. In fact, it was so good that I have put my name down for a taxi load next weekend and will book into one of the boarding houses which charges only ten shillings for a bed and three meals.

Well, it is a year since I joined up and I had two jabs on Friday so my writing arm is sore. To celebrate the anniversary I was given guard duty from 9.30 – 11.30 p.m. and 3.30 – 5.30 a.m., a very lonely beat, plus duty crew on the aerodrome two nights running. I have just ironed my shirts and shorts for the weekend as the laundry knocks them about.

[*Diary:* While I was on duty crew a B-17 Flying Fortress, the first I have seen on the ground, came in during a big electrical storm and we had to refuel it. I got talking to some of the crew while I sheltered in out of the rain and they were saying how, in the South, they gave the “niggers” a bad time. Also a C-47 Douglas Dakota landed with a load of bomb-happy negroes from New Guinea, who were taken to the cells in the guard room overnight. One of them kept us awake, calling out all night, “Let me out of here, I ain’t insane”. Although I was a bit scared in case one escaped, I could not help feeling sorry for them.]

Well, only a fortnight till my leave. I am pleased you have a good tenant for the farm who will look after it while it is leased. As far as shipping the furniture to Sydney on the Arakoon is concerned, while there is always the risk of a submarine attack, it is not as bad as it was a year ago.

11 November 1943

I had an eventful trip back here from leave. I got a seat at Kempsey in a compartment with two Yanks and a Digger.



*The Sir Leslie Wilson Home for Western Children, Torquay, Queensland, used by RAAF as a convalescent home, then as a leave centre.*

An RAAF chap said he and some mates had been kicked out of a compartment leaving only three Yanks in it, so I guess they had given the conductor a good tip. We had to wait 45 minutes just out of Brisbane for a hospital train to go through.

When I got to Roma Street Station the fun started. The train and platform were packed. With some other Maryborough boys we tried tipping the conductor with no luck and we looked like being left behind with me “ack willy” (AWL) again. Just then the RTO came along and said, “Can’t you find a seat, boys? Come along with me and I’ll sign your leave passes to say you could not get on and you will have to wait until Wednesday night.”

Well, that was OK for anyone whose home was in Brisbane but I knew nothing about accommodation there. Fortunately, among those left behind was a chap I had been to The Bay with, and he invited me to stay at his parents’ home. So after sending a telegram to the Adjutant explaining the situation, we caught a tram to his home overlooking the Brisbane River, in a tropical garden setting.

It was a mansion and I had my own room with a basin and hot and cold water. Ted’s father is the managing director

of a big timber joinery and plywood factory and his mother had travelled widely. The home was full of antique furniture and original paintings galore. It was such a big home that even when I left after two nights I couldn’t find my way from the bedroom to the dining room.

Ted had the use of the family Ford V-8, which was fitted with a gas producer so there was no problem with petrol. We saw a show, *Reap The Wild Wind* and at night went to the Tivoli Show. On the way we drove down Albert Street where there were long queues of Yanks, kept in line by MPs, waiting to get into the houses of ill fame. The next day he picked up a couple of WAAAF friends and we spent the day on the beach at Sandgate. So I saw quite a bit of Brisbane. Naturally I got a bit of ribbing from the boys when I arrived back at the hut, two days overdue.

Our letters are no longer censored but we are urged to be careful what we write. So I may be able to tell you a bit more about the job.

22 November 1943

By now you will be in Sydney and, I hope, settling into the new home and way of life, which won’t be easy after 20 years on the farm and being your own boss. Thanks for the write-up of your send-off in Clybucca Hall. It will be a long time before you make the headlines again. I don’t like the sound of Beryl and Mona’s factory job, but as you will be there too, you can see to their company.

On Friday evening we had a fearful electrical storm with the blackest clouds and most vivid lightning I have ever seen, but it was all over in two hours. When it rains here it really rains and it must be the start of the “wet season”. The water is 8–10 inches deep in minutes on the asphalt. I was trapped in the shower block for half an hour until it eased off. Ted and I went to The Bay on Saturday and as we couldn’t get into the hotel, eventually got a room at a ramshackle old boarding house. Fortunately the landlady was kindness itself and couldn’t do enough for Air Force boys. For two meals and a bed we paid only three shillings a day.

On the way back on the train a few of the boys who

had been celebrating a 21st birthday got off the train with no shoes, socks, ties or caps and were immediately run in by the SPs, who were at the station, and now all of them are up on six charges. On Saturday some of the same crowd got into a brawl with the CCC (Civil Construction Corps) workers who are building a new camp here for the Yanks, and were run in by the civil police, so I guess the CO will have a few words to say about the weekend on parade this morning.

This week I am taking my turn "pearl-diving" (dish-washing) in the mess. We work from 6.30 - 9.00 a.m., 11.30 a.m. - 1.30 p.m. and 5.30 - 7.00 p.m. This evening, when we were nearing the end of washing thousands of dishes, my mate said to me, "Well, only another 200 to go, Sully!" Don't ask me to wash up when I come home on leave!

We had another crash here when a Wackett, which had just taken off, had an engine failure as the pilot was banking at low altitude and headed for the "deck", as we call the ground. She hit very heavily and broke off the engine and undercarriage as well as smashing up the wing and forward fuselage. The pilot was severely cut about but the WAG trainee only suffered shock. The plane was a write-off.

#### 10 December 1943

I am now working on the tarmac after three months on 40 and 80-hourly inspection in the hangars. That's not how long the inspections take but the flying hours between inspections. We get up at 5.15 and start work at 5.45, have breakfast at 7.00 a.m. and finish at 5.00 p.m., which is a long day. Our job is to push the kites out on to the flight line, carry out a pre-flight inspection, service them between flights, do a daily inspection at the end of the day and return them to the hangars. One advantage is that we can work in shorts as the sun would roast us in our heavy overalls, but the glare from the bitumen is so bad we should be issued with sunglasses like the Yanks wear.

We now have on the station a Flying Officer Copley, an air gunner on the famous Lancaster which is out here. In a

talk on his experiences he gave the ground staff a pat on the back (one of the few) for the work we do. His Squadron held the record for serviceability for the whole of Bomber Command for three months. In his first raid, which was the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne, he said they all gawked out to see the searchlights and flak coming up at them. On one raid their Lancaster was hit by a load of incendiary bombs dropped by another above them over Berlin, where it is nothing to see up to 250 searchlights, he said.

#### 17 December 1943

I hope you will overlook the fact that I haven't bought a Christmas present for you as there is nothing in the shops unless you use clothing coupons, which I need more than you do. However, I am saving a half-pound block of chocolate I got at the canteen when they were on as a rare special.

During the current wet spell we are getting a lot of visiting aircraft dropping in. I counted 31 troops getting off a Douglas C-47 Dakota, which came in with engine trouble and almost dry tanks and we had to pump 400 gallons into her. The pilot must have landed by instinct as the first we saw of it was when it taxied in out of the gloom. We have also had our first B-25 Mitchell bomber and a new fighter, the P-47 Thunderbolt. Invariably the first thing the Yank pilots say when they get out is, "Say buddy, what field is this?" followed by, "How far is it to Brisbane?" if they are heading south. Most of them couldn't find their way from one corner to the other of a dark room.

By trying to fit four weeks of WAG training flights into three, by starting an hour earlier and by working next Sunday, we should get four days off over Christmas, so I have booked in at The Bay.

#### 1 January 1944

My second Christmas in the RAAF passed very quietly, quite a contrast to my first. We went down to The Bay in RAAF trucks and spent most of our time in the water, even after the dances at night. Christmas dinner consisted of cold ham,

fowl, baked vegetables and tinned Christmas pudding and custard, which wasn't too bad for a RAAF cook. We had a five gallon keg of beer which didn't go far as the home was crowded but the Torquay Hotel was just up the road so no one went short. Your Christmas cake was excellent and the bulk of it went over the weekend. I thought of you often and wondered how you were spending it.

You should never complain about the food shortages after reading about the situation in Townsville, where there is no labour to deliver food for civilians, and adults and children are queuing up from midnight to make sure of getting essential food, and ice for their ice chests.

Well, what a start to the New Year — I am on guard duty again and as usual it is a two-day weekend, the third time in succession. I am writing this in one of the remote direction finding huts, on duty from 2.30 – 6.30 a.m, mainly, I think, to protect the WAAAF who work here.

Today there was a WAG pass-out parade and as usual they send up a formation of Wacketts to shoot-up the parade. As I have been here for four months without a flip I put my name down, and scored a ride. My pilot was Flight Lieutenant Devenish-Meares, who is a pre-war instructor, so felt in safe hands. As I was being strapped in I asked him if there would be any aerobatics and he replied, "No. I think the clouds are too low."

After we took off and formed up into a three-plane formation at 1,500 feet, down went the nose as we headed for the parade ground where the WAGs were receiving their "sparks" badges as Wireless Operators (Air). We shot over the parade at 250 feet at the tremendous speed of 130 mph and after repeating this climbed to 1,000 feet and peeled off. When I saw the altimeter start to wind up until it reached 3,500 feet I knew it was on, despite the pilot's reassurance on the ground. As we started our dive I held on to the sides of the cockpit like grim death, closed my eyes and repeated "Paddy" Finucane's last words, "Well, this is it chaps!"

I didn't find out just what we had done until back on the deck. All I could remember was alternately having the seat fall away from me as we dived and then having my head

forced down to my knees by the "G" forces as we climbed. By then I could no longer keep my dinner down and the pilot, looking over his shoulder and seeing I wasn't enjoying aerobatics, throttled back and landed. I apologised for cutting short his fun and asked him what we had done and he casually replied, "Oh, a slow roll, a loop and a couple of stall turns".

Back with the boys I felt like a celebrity being interviewed by reporters as I described it to them. I didn't feel any better when one of them said we put on the best show he had seen by Wacketts at a pass-out parade.

So I had a memorable New Year's Day. Anyway, what is the use of being in the RAAF if you don't fly occasionally?

#### 10 January 1944

After two days of steady rain, flying was abandoned for the day at 9.30 a.m. As luck would have it I was on duty crew again. By evening we seemed to have half the USAAF 5th Air Force on the tarmac. First four Douglas C-47 transports came in, followed by a huge four-engined B-24 Liberator bomber. A chap in our hut was lucky enough to get on it to go south on leave. Then in from the east came four P-47 Thunderbolt fighters accompanied by a P-38 Lockheed Lightning, photo-reconnaissance version, which really shot the place up before landing. When taxiing the pilot's view is obstructed by the immense 18-cylinder radial engine of the P-47, and one of them just missed chopping the tail off one of our pathetic little Wacketts with its huge 14 feet diameter four-bladed propeller.

Next morning I helped the pilots turn the props over before starting and the five of them sounded great. After take off they again shot-up the main runway, coming down to ten feet over our heads, so close I could have reached up and touched them. I would certainly not like to be any little "yellow-bellies" who got in their way.

After refuelling a RAAF Bristol Beaufort and two more C-47s, we heard a tremendous roar and back came the five USAAF fighters which had turned back because of the weather further north. Then we began the task of refuelling

them as well, which meant taking a truck to the 44-gallon drum fuel dump, where it got bogged twice and had to be unloaded and reloaded. When we got back to the tarmac with the, by now, precious juice, the engine-driven pump had gone U/S (unserviceable) and we had to complete the refuelling by hand, which took 20 minutes per drum. By the time we had finished the last of the P-47s it was 1.00 a.m. and I never wanted to see another "forty-four" as we estimated we had transferred over 2,000 gallons.

They all left this morning and it is peaceful again, except for the drone of the Wacketts.

I went to the town hall dance again last night, but left after ten minutes as it was full of Yanks from a convoy going through. As most of them had been here before and knew a lot of the girls, the RAAF didn't stand a chance as they all want to jitterbug. I think the local girls have been spoilt by having too many fellows chase them. As one of my mates said, "Never look forward to anything in Maryborough, Sullo, and you won't be disappointed".

17 January 1944

It may be some time before I again mention to you that I want to get into aircrew. Last Thursday, just after take off, a Wackett crashed, killing the pilot, Flying Officer Cornall, and critically injuring the WAG trainee, LAC Wood. [*Diary*: They were flying in A3-16.]

The pilot had only recently been posted here after returning from the Middle East, where he flew Kittyhawks before he was shot down and taken POW by the Italians. When they surrendered he was released, and eventually was repatriated to Australia to fly again.

It was only his second flight here and I was on the wingtip and had strapped him in. He seemed a beaut bloke and was asking me about tarmac drill and taxiing procedures here. I watched him taxi out and take off and five minutes later saw the plane crash about a mile away. We gave the alarm and jumped on the crash tender, arriving at the scene in a cane field just as the ambulance did. Fortunately the wreckage didn't catch fire but I'll remember

the sight as long as I live. Every time I think of it I see him slumped in the cockpit with his officer's cap lying on the wing, and to think I was talking to him only a few minutes before. The boys who got him out of the wreckage said every bone in his body seemed to be broken. I will have to give eye-witness evidence at the Court of Enquiry.

To think he had to be killed in Australia flying a slow training plane. Just fate, I suppose. I think I'll get the address of his wife and write to her. I have enclosed a report from the local paper.

1 February 1944

Last night I was up until 2.00 a.m. on a special job which I can't tell you about. It was very interesting and as it had a real purpose I did not mind getting a soaking.

[*Diary*: 31 January 1944. Last night with 50 others we had to defend the airfield perimeter against a mock commando attack by paratroopers who had been dropped from a modified B-24 Liberator on the coast. With three blank rounds in my 0.303 rifle, I spent four hours in drizzling rain in a slit trench, straining my eyes and ears for the slightest movement. I saw two shadowy figures but they were too far away to challenge, but the next guard got them. At the debriefing we were told that they had penetrated our "defences", so I suppose it was successful from their point of view.]

[Many years later I learned that Fraser Island had been used as a commando-training area, which explained the purpose of our exercise, as the Liberator, with a parachutist exit chute under the rear fuselage, had been operating from Maryborough, but naturally we were told nothing of its purpose. In Stewart Wilson's *The Boston, Mitchell and Liberator in Australian Service* he writes:

[Covert operations . . . in the South West Pacific Area began with the coastwatchers . . . and developed to include those involved in guerrilla activities . . . Following some success with parachute dropped personnel behind enemy lines from a modified 24 Squadron (RAAF) Liberator in the second half of 1944 . . . approval was

given in early 1945 to form No.200 (Special Duties) Flight equipped with six Liberators.

200 Flight's first commanding officer was Sqn Ldr Graham Pockley DFC, a former Sunderland pilot with No.10 Squadron in Britain.]

When I was posted to No.41 Squadron at Cairns in September, Sqn Ldr Pockley was Temporary CO. He was lost when his Liberator failed to return from a mission to drop agents and stores in Borneo on 15 March 1945.

#### 8 February 1944

My re-classification to LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] was announced in Unit PORs [Personnel Occurrence Reports] today. It's not a promotion but a recognition of efficiency and I am about the last of our chaps to receive it. It means I can wear a propeller on my sleeves. If I am left here any longer I should be due for the "Maryborough Star"! There are only 15 left out of those who were here when I arrived.

Thanks for the big bundle of papers. I could hardly believe it when I read that the famous "Pyjama Girl" murder mystery had been solved, and it is the chief topic of conversation here. I have started eating the cake which, as usual, is a beauty.

Isn't Berlin taking a pounding? God knows what life must be like there, with the US 8th Air Force bombing it by day and the RAAF Bomber Command at night. You can see Churchill's threat, that he would repay them a thousandfold for bombing British cities, becoming a reality now.

Talking about the progress of the war, when I was home on leave I meant to dig out some of my teachers' college textbooks, to refresh my memory for when this show ends. Last week we had to fill in the "RAAF Census Form" which is to help plan post-war reconstruction. The main headings were: Personal Particulars; Pre-War Occupation; Post-War Preferred Occupation; Post-War Employment Prospects; Post-War Education If Desired; Land Settlement; Housing Requirements and Demobilisation. Unfortunately they didn't include a crystal ball to help with the answers!

Gosh, we are working long hours again — up at 5.30 a.m., have a cup of tea, down to the hangars at 5.45 to push the kites out in the pitch dark, see them out and in until 4.00 p.m. and then do a couple of daily inspections before going for tea at 5.30 p.m., which means we go seven hours without a meal if we have dinner at 11.00 a.m. We complain to our NCO but are told we will be working longer hours next month.

We are still getting plenty of visitors, the latest being the Vultee Vengeance dive bombers flown by the RAAF. They are a huge single-engined plane with cranked wings like a German Stuka and the pilots look like buccaneers with big moustaches and revolvers slung from their hips.

P.S. URGENT! Try and get me some hair-oil, preferably Brylcreem as it is unprocurable here. Chocolates have been on again in the canteen so I will send some in return.

#### Letter From Home 14 February 1944

Congratulations on your promotion to Leading Aircraftsman, and not before time.

We are settling down to our new life here and as Dad is on day shift I get up at 4.15 to get him away, which is not much different to the farm. The girls are on night shift and the boys have gone back to school after the holidays but wish they had their old teacher down here.

What do you think of the invasion of the Marshall Islands? The radio commentators seem to think it is very important, so let's hope they soon start to blow the Japs to the "hot place". The planes have been very busy at Bankstown today with ten Kittyhawks and six Bostons heading off north. *Mum*

It would be kind of you if you could get the name and address of that poor flying officer you saw crash, and tell his wife and people how you met him and were the last person on the ground to speak to him and that you saw the crash and went to his assistance. Think how you would feel if someone was kind enough to tell you how one of yours met their death. I am sure you would receive a grateful reply.  
*Dad*

*From 3 WAGS "Prangborough" 19 February 1944*

Well, they must have listened to our complaints as we now work two shifts from 5.30 a.m. – 12 noon and from 11.45 a.m. – 8.00 p.m. We have had several more crashes, fortunately none being fatal, one down near the mouth of the Mary River which ended up ramming into a farm gatepost and the other a forced landing on the beach down at The Bay. Another landed back at the 'drome with one cylinder blown off the radial engine and hanging on by the spark plug leads. The Wacketts are really clapped out and more dangerous to fly than in operations. I am not looking for flips in them any more.

The *Brisbane Truth* had a story this week about a Yank who got life for murdering an Aussie sailor, another life for attacking a little girl of five, and another ten years for attacking an Australian nurse. I was talking to a decent one the other day, a C-47 pilot, who has been out here for two years and knows Australia pretty well. Just the same, I would not like to hear of the girls going out with them now they are in Sydney.

Now that I am on early shift I have been able to go to the CUSA [Catholic United Services Association] dances. I am used to their style of dancing now and usually have a good time. By the way, after six months of sleeping on the floor, I have scored a wire bed from a mate who was posted, so will enjoy being able to sleep in when we go on to late shift. We have also acquired a little writing table for the hut and I am sitting on the end of the hut corporal's bed, as he is the only one officially allowed to have a bed. Talk about class distinction!

The other night some of us were discussing Ireland's attitude to the war and soon there was a ding-dong argument raging with only two sticking up for the Irish. Then it turned to communism and just as it was getting a bit heated, one of the wags sang out, "Joe Stalin for King" and brought the house down. Another saying we have is that everything would be all right if we had an Irish King and a Protestant Pope!

The meals are still pretty lousy. For instance, tea

tonight was stew, turnip and potato and a watery soup. I have lost over eight pounds since I left Melbourne, but it could be the climate.



*Result of Wackett collision with farm gate-post after forced-landing, Mary River area.*

[*Diary:* I had my first flight in a DH Dragon A34-76 flown by Flying Officer Don Cameron and although he threw her around, for the first time I was not airsick.]

20 March 1944

Today I am back in "flying gang" on the tarmac doing running repairs, which is better than the dead-end job I have been doing of seeing kites out and in. Gosh, you have to keep your eyes on some of the chaps. This morning no one appeared to be doing pre-flight inspections so I had a wander around and found a loose aileron hinge on one and a flap which would not fully close on another and this was

on planes they had signed as serviceable. Neither in itself would have caused a crash but it indicated either carelessness or laziness in doing their "dailies".

As an example of how careful you have to be, last Friday when about 30 miles out, a pilot noticed that the bolt which acts as fulcrum on the bottom of the control column was loose and he was having great difficulty in controlling the kite. He was at 4,000 feet so he told the WAG trainee to bale out, which he promptly did. The pilot thought of following him but could not keep the kite straight and level while he jumped, although normally a Wackett will fly "hands off" for a short time. So he stayed with it and put it down in a swampy clearing, causing only slight damage. The trainee landed safely not far away.

He is lucky as after such a feat he gets five shillings from everyone on his course, which will amount to £22, on one condition, and that is that he must have retained the rip cord handle and cable from the parachute. In addition, if he transmits a "May Day" message and it is picked up on the ground, he gets another two shillings from everyone on his course. I don't think he qualified for that bonus. Also, the WAAAF who packed the 'chute is paid one shilling.

Excuse the mistakes but there is a big poker game going on in the middle of the hut and the chap on the next bed is singing to himself.

#### 27 March 1944

I booked in at the Scarness Hotel last weekend with my mate Jack, but we came back prematurely as it turned out showery, windy and cold. A local chap tried to organise a launch party across to Fraser Island just off the coast but when it became too rough he called it off, which was just as well as I would have been seasick for sure. I have just seen a good picture in camp on the life of Amy Johnson, and last week saw *Eagle Squadron*, which is about a Yank in an RAF Spitfire squadron, and *Flying Tigers*, the story of a Yank fighter squadron in Burma. Just as well we have pictures to pass away our spare time at night. I must get a posting soon as a lot of new chaps have been posted in and I am one of the last of the old hands left.

I am trying out a new brand of fruit drink the canteen has, called Mynor Fruit Cup, and it is very nice too.

As I write some of the old Avro Ansons are night-flying and make an impressive sight as they come in with their bright landing lights on. There was a sensation here last Saturday morning when a USAAF B-25 Mitchell bomber, which was returning north after crew leave in Brisbane with the bomb bay loaded up with grog of all kinds, shot up the aerodrome after take off. The pilot pulled her up into such a steep climb that the G force (centrifugal force) forced everything they had in the bomb bay out and it fell to the ground. We thought he had hit a flock of birds but when we ran over to see, we found bottles of beer, whisky, gin and brandy smashed flat into the soft ground, plus all their personal gear and clothing. Just as well none of the crew were sitting over the bomb bay. They lost 14 cases of beer and spirits and we wonder what they will tell their mates when they return to the Islands.

#### 17 April 1944

There is nothing much to report except the pictures I've seen this week: *Hatters' Castle* and *Deanna Durbin* in Spring Parade in Maryborough, and *This Above All* in camp.

The Queensland papers gave publicity to Calwell's one day suppression of newspapers in Sydney, but played safe by not commenting on it. This Labour government seems to think it can do anything it likes, even to threatening the much-guarded freedom of the press. I think the Big Show on the other side of the world will occur within the next few weeks as the special censorship precautions in Britain indicate large-scale troop movements. In camp last night we saw one of Damien Parer's best newsreels, of the 17th Brigade fighting in the Wau-Salamua campaign. He said, "They passed all known limits of physical endurance," and I take my hat off to them. Everyone in the country should see it to let them see what the Diggers up there are doing.

Two more mates posted today. I wonder when my turn will come?

24 April 1944

On Friday last the Lancaster was due to arrive on its Victory Loan tour and the station had a real carnival atmosphere and not much work was done.

Nine Wacketts were to do formation flying with maintenance boys as passengers, so when my name was read out I didn't knock back the opportunity. We cruised around for an hour and 25 minutes and due to the bumpiness and constant jockeying to keep a tight formation I was extremely airsick. I used four paper bags and was glad there were no aerobatics this time. [*Diary: Wackett A3-39, flown by Sgt Pilot Speet.*]

Fortunately I had recovered by the time the Lanc. arrived. She was beautiful to watch and as graceful as a fighter as she did steep banks and turns at very low level, before landing. We had a very quick look through her and she is certainly huge, very high off the ground and has a tremendous bomb bay almost 30 feet long. When they flew on to Bundaberg on Sunday the local radio station announcer was aboard and described the flight, saying such things as, "This is what your War Bonds are buying."

That wasn't the only excitement for me that weekend. Jack and I went to The Bay for the weekend by RAAF tender and were over-carried past the boarding-house we had booked into. We began to walk to Torquay and when a car approached from behind us, tried thumbing a ride. It was dark and when it pulled up we could see that it was a RAAF staff car, with a passenger in front and two civilians in the back, driven by a WAAAF.

Well, there is no pride in my family when it comes to accepting charity, even from the CO so Jack got in front and I squeezed in the back with the two civvies. As we started off, the chap in the front leaned back and said, "I am Forde, the Acting Prime Minister," and shook our hands.

Well, I was too dumbfounded to do anything but gulp out, "Pleased to meet you, Mr Forde".

He wanted to know who we were and where we came from and wanted to know if there was "an attraction" down at The Bay, so we explained that it was a break from

camp life and food. He was taking the opportunity to fly home to his electorate at Rockhampton after parliament had adjourned. The other passengers were the Mayor and Mayoress of Maryborough.

It took us nearly all night to get over our cheek in thumbing a ride with such dignitaries and they probably had a good laugh, too. There is nothing like this show for getting experiences and you should be used to hearing things like that now.

30 April 1944

Another Sunday in camp in an empty hut, as most of the boys have gone home on weekend leave, so will fill in the time with a letter.

Last Thursday night I was the Fitter IIA on night flying duty while two Avro Ansons were doing "circuits and bumps" and had a busy time. The first job was to lay out a flare path at sunset. The flares are like big iron garden pots filled with kerosene and a thick, round wick. On one side the glass is green and on the other red, depending on which side of the landing strip they go. The Anson's brakes are operated by compressed air in a bottle which I had to keep topped up from a mobile air compressor. We were supplied with tea and sandwiches from the cook-house and worked until 11.00 p.m., for which we were given the next morning off.

It looks as if the "main event" on the other side may come any day now, with the papers using all available adjectives to describe the intensity of the air attacks on Europe. I wonder if I will still be here when the war ends, as I am sure Air Force Headquarters has forgotten that I exist!

Thanks for the latest bundle of papers, which do the rounds of the hut, and for the fruit cake which is up to your usual standard — rich and moist and very enjoyable when the hunger pangs set in.

During the week I received in the mail a comforts parcel from the NSW Teachers' Federation, containing three sample packets of corn flakes, six packets of chewing gum, a tin of condensed milk, a tin of fruit salad, a writing pad and envelopes, soap, toothpaste, ham and chicken paste and

Bonox, packed by Goodlands Grocery. I will write and thank them for it.

8 May 1944

Three more have been posted from our hut to No.2 Embarkation Depot, lucky devils. One of them was Roy Partridge-Wall, with whom I joined up at 2RD. He has been posted everywhere with me so far, which is very unusual in the RAAF. It has made a big hole in my circle of cobbers and makes you realise that there is no permanency in the friends you make. With the one mate left in flying gang, I was offered a job in the hangars on 240-hourly inspections but knocked it back as we are on a good wicket.

A new chap, Ken, has just been giving us the history of how he has been treated. He was "scrubbed" from WAG training and made a straight air gunner, went to England where he became a Flight Sergeant tail gunner in Lancasters, but after a year was scrubbed from that because of airsickness. He is back here as a Leading Aircraftman and classified medically as fit for ground staff duties only, so has applied for training as an Air Traffic Control officer. Today he sent a ten page letter to the Air Board demanding a redress of grievances. He is very interesting when he talks about his experiences on the other side, and, of six cobbers he went away with, he is the only one left.

I have not seen my old primary schoolmate, Harry, for some time and the last time he did not recognise me. The little white flash that WAG trainees wear in their caps makes a big difference to some, who treat ground staff as labourers.

Things are pretty tense with the invasion of Europe likely any day now, unless you regard the way our planes are doing what they like over France as the start of the invasion from the air.

Some of the boys are pleased to hear of the arrival of US servicewomen in Australia. They say it's a good chance to get their own back on the Yanks! They have had plenty of publicity in the papers, particularly in the letters when our boys rub it in to the Aussie girls, but they don't seem to be the Hollywood beauties they were made out to be.

At last I can wear my blue uniform, as I got my friend the hut Corporal, who is a pretty good hand with a needle, to sew my LAC badges on for me.

20 May 1944

We have had news of one of our mates who was posted to Embarkation Depot and who is now near Darwin. Six months after he was married his wife died. He is taking it pretty hard as he was only 19. My best friend, Jack Neuhaus, has been posted up that way too, so that breaks up the old crowd of mates completely.

The weather has been beautiful recently and I can see myself coming up here to "Sunny Queensland", as the locals call it, on holidays after the war.

I may as well tell you that two months ago I did something which could have altered the rest of my life. As nothing has come of it I will tell you about it. On 16 April I applied for a Japanese language course of 18 months, to train as a Japanese interpreter at the University of Sydney. I was attracted for several reasons: it would get me used to study again and might be useful after the war, as well as getting me up north, as one requirement was "fit for tropical service". It seemed to be a good opportunity to learn something of great career value at government expense and may even have led to a commission. I have just been told by the adjutant that I was unsuccessful.

Instead, I have been put on a desk job in Maintenance Records, so I am a "shiny bum". My job is to enter up in each aircraft's maintenance log book, the engine, airframe and propeller flying times from the daily records, as well as all inspections, repairs and replacement of major components. This gives a complete history of the aircraft from the time it was manufactured, so accuracy and neatness are very important and you have to keep your mind on the job. I work under a Corporal with another fitter and a WAAAF.

My last job in the hangar resulted in a test flight in a DH Dragon A35-75, to see if I had corrected it from flying "left wing low", as they do not have trim tabs to correct the

problem. After 20 minutes flying it was still the same, and into the bargain I was airsick although we flew straight and level most of the time. It must be a rogue aircraft.

The latest thing in our rations is a pale, white greasy butter substitute which looks like lard and tastes like the oil on top of peanut butter, so I am eating dry bread with golden syrup to fill up on, as the main meals are almost inedible. For instance, tea tonight consisted of watery soup followed by a spoonful of M and V [tinned meat and vegetable] with hard-boiled rice and a dirty spud in its jacket. I know I should not complain about the food as thousands are worse off, but this is supposed to be civilisation.

19 June 1944

Yesterday I saw one of the most memorable sights I am ever likely to see. One of the latest beautiful little Spitfire Mk VIII's came over. It was a lovely sight and the Rolls Royce Merlin engine makes a thrilling sound. Everyone on the station came out to watch as it shot us up from four different directions at top speed, to go into a zooming climb with a slow roll at the top. Most of us could not find the words to describe it and they look just as beautiful on the ground as they do in the air.

Thanks for the details of the DH Mosquito crash at Bankstown, John, which at least confirms that they are being made in Australia. It sounds a very fishy business, with a test pilot on board.

The pilotless plane attacks on southern England have caused a sensation, and when I read the first reports (of the V-1 or "buzz bombs") I wondered what next the war would produce in the way of aerial warfare. I suppose the scientists and anti-aircraft experts are working all out to produce a counter weapon or tactics to deal with them before they become a serious menace. Otherwise, the Allies are making advances on all fronts following the invasion of Europe. Most of us now appreciate the good jobs the Yanks are doing and if anyone runs them down they are soon picked up about it.

My leave has been granted from 14–28 July which will give me ten days at home, unless I can wangle a trip on the RAAF Lockheed Lodestar transport which calls in on its Sydney–Brisbane–Townsville run. That would reduce the two and a half day train trip to only four hours. A complication is that I have boils on my neck caused, I think, by our poor diet lately. Boys who have been down south say that the Sydney to Brisbane troop train now has carriages fitted with triple-decker bunks, which should be more comfortable than the luggage racks we sometimes have had to sleep in.

11 July 1944

The showery weather continues, so have been going to the camp pictures at every opportunity and have seen some good shows, including *Bataan*, which was very realistic but perhaps too much blood and guts for your liking, *Seven Sweethearts*, *Guadalcanal Diary* about the US Marines campaign there, and not too much of the "we are the best in the world" stuff, and *Cabin in the Sky* which had an all-negro cast headed by Duke Ellington. A lot did not like it as it was unusual but I did, perhaps because of the swing music. I must have seen hundreds of pictures since I joined up.

What do you think of the referendum on giving the government more powers? As soon as there is a "Vote Yes" ad on the radio all the boys yell out, "Don't be silly! Vote No!"

If all the service people feel the same as we do here, the government won't get many votes for increased powers as it will affect us most. We all want to get away from the regimentation and discipline and don't want to be told what we can and can't do and what job to take up by the bureaucrats of a Labour dictatorship after the war.

Talking of dictators, the CO here is a real little Hitler. Recently all our mess tables were repainted as the tops were greasy, shabby and unhygienic. Well, some idiot had to go and scratch his initials on one, so on parade last Tuesday the CO had the table held up in front of the flag pole while we

all gave it an “eyes right” as we marched past. I have had to do all sorts of things in this show but have never had to salute a table before. As we say, “The RAAF can do what it likes to you but it can’t make you love the baby!”

**John wrote from Bankstown:**

The Mosquitos are plentiful here on test flights from the De Havilland factory. We see one up every day on speed and dive tests and at times vapour trails at high altitude.

I went out to that crash this morning in which two men were killed. The fuselage was off Milperra Road with one engine and a propeller 200 yards away, the other engine 250 yards away and the four cannons nearby. The wreckage was guarded by airmen with fixed bayonets who had a difficult job in keeping the curious spectators away.

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1944:

Plane breaks up in air

TWO KILLED ON TEST FLIGHT

A test pilot and the supply manager for De Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd were killed when a plane broke up during a test flight near Sydney on Saturday.

The test pilot was Hubert Boss-Walker, 33, of Macleay Street, Kings Cross. The other victim, Peter Fabian Rockingham, 38, of Rosemount Street, Edgecliff, was a passenger.

Police were told that soon after take-off both engines became detached, falling on to a traffic bridge. The mutilated bodies of both men were found in the cabin some distance from the other wreckage which was strewn through the bush.

Police are assisting Air Force officials to ascertain the cause of the plane breaking up.

*Beaufort, Beaufighter and Mosquito in Australian Service*, by Stewart Wilson, Aerospace Publications Pty Ltd, 1990:

The investigation [of the crash of Mosquito A52-12 during pre-delivery acceptance testing] revealed a faulty fitting in the

wing box spar — resulting in the grounding of all Mosquitos pending inspection of all wings in final assembly or in aircraft already delivered or flying. Out of this came the discovery of 18 faulty wings, including some on aircraft which had already flown.

Another crash, on 31 January 1945 at Williamstown, resulted in the Mosquito being grounded for a second time, when A52-29 broke up following the failure of the mainplane. De Havilland reported the accident was “due to a probable defective glued joint in the starboard wing”. Between then and May 1945 some 31 Mosquitos were inspected of which only six were declared satisfactory — causing delays to the whole programme.

**28 July 1944**

I had an uncomfortable but uneventful trip back from leave with very little sleep on the trains, and am already missing the good meals at home. There were more Yanks than ever in Brisbane and quite a few Women’s Army Corps too. The war news is good on all fronts, in Normandy, in Eastern Europe on the Russian front and from Guam in the Pacific, so it should not be too long now. I give it till early in 1945.

I will be seeing you again much sooner than I expected as today I got a posting to the Embarkation Depot at Bradfield Park, where I started off. I should arrive on the 3.00 p.m. troop train next Friday and will send a telegram. I can’t believe I am leaving at last after 11 months here, and to think I put my name down for The Bay next weekend!

*A RAAF version of the War-time song “Bless ‘Em All”*

Bless ‘Em All, Bless ‘Em All, Bless ‘Em All,  
From Wagga right up to Rabaul.  
Bless the CO and the old CFI,  
Bless the poor blighters who taught me to fly.  
‘Cause we’re saying goodbye to them all,  
As back to their messes they crawl.  
You’ll get no promotion on this bloomin’ station,  
So cheer up my lads, Bless ‘Em All.

Now officers don't worry me, officers don't worry me,  
Bell-bottom trousers with stripes down the side,  
Great bulging pockets with nothing inside.  
So we're saying goodbye to them all,  
As back to the "Pig Pen" they crawl.  
You'll get no promotion etc.

Now NCOs don't worry me, NCOs don't worry me,  
They hang round the hangars, they talk and they shout,  
They give you some jobs they know nothing about.  
So we're saying goodbye to them all,  
As back to the "Snake Pit" they crawl.  
You'll get no promotion etc.

They say there's a Wirraway out on the field,  
Set for a cross country flight,  
Hydraulics leaking and dropping some revs,  
Hoping she'll get back all right.  
There's many a cylinder running a temp,  
Through having no oil on its wall,  
But with good navigation and much concentration,  
She'll get there and back, Bless 'Em All.

(Repeat first verse)

Now they say that the Japs have some bloody good kites,  
Of this we no longer have doubt,  
And if ever a Zero should get on your tail,  
This is the way to get out:  
Be cheerful, be careful, be calm and sedate  
Don't let your Aussie blood boil,  
Don't hesitate, just push her right through the gate,  
And you'll drown the poor bastard in oil.

(Repeat first verse)

*Anonymous*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Just a great feeling of relief*

#### Letters from No.41 Squadron, Cairns, Queensland

By August of 1944 it was clear that the Allied victory, after five years of total war, was only a matter of time — about one year, I thought. North Africa had been cleared of Axis forces, Rome had been liberated, Allied armies were rolling across France towards Paris and the mighty Soviet army was relentlessly pursuing German armies across the plains of Poland where it had all started.

In the Pacific war, the twin campaigns by land and sea were closing in on the Phillipines via the island chain to the north of New Guinea, in fulfilment of General Douglas MacArthur's promise, "I shall return", and across the islands of Micronesia to within striking distance of the Japanese mainland itself, although at great cost in lives on both sides. It seemed to me that within 18 months or less the war in the Pacific would also be over.

My next posting would probably be my last opportunity to see active service. A posting to No.2 Embarkation Depot (2 ED), Bradfield Park meant the fulfilment of that ambition, I thought, as I packed my kitbag

and said farewell to my remaining mates at 3 WAGS, before leaving for six days pre-embarkation leave at home, now in Bankstown, NSW. On reporting to the orderly room at 2 ED, I found that before I went anywhere near the shooting war I would have to undergo a basic airfield defence course — in Air Force parlance the “commando course”. For the next ten days I learned how to dismantle, re-assemble and use the 0.303 Lee Enfield rifle, the Thompson sub-machine gun, the Bren light machine gun, and to fuse and throw the hand grenade — the last a prospect we were told was like having your first “naughty”. As I had not had that experience, I was even more terrified of what lay in store for me.

I successfully completed the course but my lack of accuracy in all departments ensured that any Japanese I accidentally encountered would be pretty safe. When I was posted from 2 ED to No.1 Reserve Personnel Pool (1 RPP), Townsville, this seemed a distinct possibility.

#### 4 September 1944

We left Sydney Central Station at 10.30 a.m. Thursday on the troop train, and 24 hours later arrived at South Brisbane, from where we were taken to an Army transit camp at Yerongpilly beside Brisbane Golf Links, where I spent the night in a tent, sleeping on the ground. On Saturday we left at 12.45 p.m. on another troop train for Townsville with stops at Gympie for tea and Rockhampton for breakfast, where the officer-in-charge of the train gave us news of the Allied entry into Belgium, which brought a cheer from the boys. We travelled all day across flat, dry grazing country where I saw Zebu hump-backed cattle for the first time and flocks of broilgas on the swamps. Lunch was served on the station at St Lawrence and we went on to Mackay for a sumptuous tea served by women volunteers and could buy sweets, etc, from a Red Cross shop on the platform.

Monday, our third day on the train, dawned at Ayr just south of Townsville. I can see now why they say the motto of the Queensland Government Railways is, “I’ll walk

beside you”! We were given breakfast of curried stew on the outskirts of Townsville and were taken from there in trucks to 1 RPP which is a huge camp in the suburbs, in a grove of mango trees. No sooner had I found my hut than we were called out for a TAB needle and a walk through the gas chamber to make sure our gas masks don’t leak, followed by the inevitable “short arm parade” by the MO. We are limited to two pages for censorship reasons, so will write again soon when I have some definite news.

[As censorship from now on again limited what I could write about my RAAF work, I used the diary my parents had given me on leaving. To avoid interruption to the narrative, I have integrated letters and diary entries in the “letters” which follow.]

#### 7 September 1944

Well, I have been on the move again and I wasn’t sorry to leave Townsville, as the main idea there was to fill in time while deciding what to do with us. We had lectures on various tropical diseases such as malaria, dengue fever and scrub typhus, and on camouflage. The Education Officer gave a talk on post-war rehabilitation which got me thinking about doing something to stop my brain from rusting up. We went on a long route march and when we stopped for smoko, our mouths as dry as chips, a lady came out of her home and said we could use her tap. As water is rationed and she must be sick of the sight of servicemen, we thought it was very kind of her. There was a Unit dance on Tuesday night, but you had to be early to get one of the 200 tickets. There is also a well-stocked canteen and ACF, YMCA and Salvation Army huts.

I have met a few chaps I have known from previous postings, coming back from the Islands and loaded up with Jap souvenirs, in which there is a roaring trade. They all have that yellow skin from the atebirin taken to prevent malaria.

I spent the second day white-washing latrines and made the job spin out all day. Yesterday morning my name was called out on parade, to report to the orderly room

where I was told that I was posted to Cairns to join No.41 Squadron. It will be a pleasant surprise for you, but I am disappointed at not getting to a battle area after getting this far north.

It could have been worse, however, as some of the boys in my draft were posted to Charters Towers. At least I will be on the coast and working on the water. My new address will be: Group 848, RAAF, Cairns, Qld. John, page 66 will give you the answer to the question you will be asking. [This was a reference to the page number of an aircraft recognition handbook I had given him. He would discover that I would be working on Martin Mariner PBM-3 flying boats. There is a brief description of the Mariner in the appendices at p.186.]

I arrived in Cairns at 1.00 this morning after a slow 12-hour trip from Townsville. The camp is on the water's edge of Trinity Bay with high, jungle-covered hills rising from the mangrove swamps to the south, just like a tourist picture. The hut is a small, four bed affair made of plywood with a malthoid-covered roof, shutters for ventilation and electric light. Our hut has a small garden in front with a frangipani with a single flower, but some of the boys who have been here a while have gardens it would be hard to beat anywhere. Meals today were of hotel standard — ham and eggs for breakfast, and for dinner, rissoles, potatoes and peas with icy cold Mynor fruit drink. As our letters are limited to three pages I will write again soon. Keep sending papers as I am going to have a lot of spare time, and when I settle in I will see the Education Officer about doing some sort of course.

13 September 1944

We are having some bonzer weather, the heat being tempered by an off-shore breeze and the nights are mild. We have to sleep under nets as there are a few mozzies around, even though the area is now supposed to be malaria-free. I saw a picture-book sight today: two pearling luggers with all canvas spread and a crew of fuzzy-haired islanders sailed up the estuary.



*The last 12 Martin Mariner PBM-3s. A70-12 delivered early 1944 to No. 41 Squadron, still in its well-worn US Navy blue-grey colour scheme. As each Mariner underwent a major inspection it was painted matte jungle green.*



*On the slipway: Mariners A70-8 (rear) and A70-11 (front) which is having the port propellor changed. US Army Air Force C-47 fuselage was used for storage.*

The acting Commanding Officer gave the new boys a pep talk on the good work the squadron is doing. He is Squadron Leader Graham Pockley, who had a corner of the Bay of Biscay named after him because of the success he had there when flying Sunderlands on U-boat patrols. There are 12 Martin Mariner flying boats moored in the estuary and we have to get to and from them in a small motor launch operated by the marine section from No.8 wharf. The officer-in-charge is Flying Officer Ken Breakspear who used to operate the joy rides from Manly Wharf before the war.

Tonight is "beer night" at the Airmen's Beer Garden, which is built of ti-tree poles out over the water. Camp is closed tonight because of an inter-service brawl in Cairns, as there are a few Yanks around. I am very happy with everything here. The work is different to my previous work, the meals are the best yet and the quarters are bearable. Living and working on the water has done wonders already for my appetite and it's just as well the canteen is well stocked with biscuits, including such pre-war favourites as iced vo vo, currant luncheon and scotch fingers, as well as chocolates and tinned fruit.

Cairns is far from being the last outpost of civilisation that I had imagined and some of the homes are mansions. The streets are all on the square, and are wide with gardens in the intersections. Altogether it is a very picturesque little town.

18 September 1944

I am on top of the world as I got the first mail here today. It makes a big difference to the spirits as so far work here has been one big bludge. A lot of the chaps make "foreigners" (souvenirs out of perspex or aluminium) to pass the time.

I managed to get a ticket for a launch trip on Sunday, our day off, out to Green Island, a tourist resort on the reef about 16 miles off the coast. The launch Merinda, a 60-footer, had about a hundred passengers and I hoped it would not be too rough. No sooner had we left the sheltered water than we ran into a southerly gale with huge green rollers hitting her beam on, and I was soon leaning over the

side. One incident soon made me forget myself. An AWAS officer lost her balance during one violent lurch and fell over the side. Fortunately I was right beside her and with another chap managed to grab an arm and pulled her back on board.

I walked around the island, which took only 25 minutes, had a look at the reef from a punt with a glass-bottomed box set in the centre and, after lunch at a small kiosk, lay in the sun until the return trip at 4.00 p.m. It was even rougher and I was very relieved to step ashore at 5.30 p.m. As there were no cafes open in Cairns and I had missed tea at the mess, I had to be content with a tin of peaches in the hut.

I had my first real job today, making a new set of cowling gill brackets for a Mariner which has to fly to Madang tomorrow, and worked till 2.00 a.m. to finish it. At last I feel I am contributing to the war effort!

27 September 1944

The bundles of papers have arrived and I have had something to read at night. I may try the squadron dance this weekend, although the boys say there are about six chaps to every girl. I went to a matinee on Saturday and saw *Gung Ho* which, as usual, was full of the standard US Marines bally-hoo. The picture theatre is quite different to down south as you sit in canvas deck chairs, and smoking is permitted.

You are backing the wrong horse if you try any match-making with Peggy, as she has never been any more than a very good friend.

On Sunday I went to church, as the C of E is only 300 yards from camp. Half the congregation was composed of servicemen and women. After the service we had tea and biscuits, so that will be something to do on Sunday nights. Cairns is full of men and women of the three services, with Yanks and Netherlands East Indies troops as well, all looking for something to do to fill in their spare time.

I had another worthwhile job today, removing a rubber, self-sealing fuel tank from the bilge area of a Mariner. I had to get right inside it and after a couple of



*Beaching party preparing Martin Mariner A70-11 for slipping, Trinity Inlet, Cairns. US Army Landing Craft Infantry in background.*



*"Ah, Sweet Mystery" A70-11, flown by Flt Lt Griffiths. Other named aircraft were: A70-4 "Donald Duck", A70-9 "Rose Bay Rose" and A70-10 "Jacquinet Bay Jane".*

hours was quite groggy from breathing high octane petrol fumes.

13 October 1944

I am really finding it hard to fill in the spare time at night and on days off. I have seen so many pictures that I sit and pick them to pieces and don't enjoy them. Yesterday I saw *Hello Beautiful* and *Nine Men* which is about the 8th Army in Libya, but it didn't do them justice after the way the Yanks go on about the Marines. At night I went with two mates to a very different kind of show, *Flesh and Fantasy*, which was so unusual that we argued about it all the way back to camp.

Today I worked on the slipway for the first time. It is on Admiralty Island, about a mile up the estuary in a mangrove swamp. The flying boats are pulled out of the water by a caterpillar tractor, after wheels attached to flotation tanks have been fitted to each side of the hull and at the rear. This is done when they are due for 40, 80 and 240-hourly inspections.

As we are cut off from the main working area at the wharf, our dinner is brought up to us by launch in hot-boxes. If there is an emergency and we need help, a Verry pistol is fired to summon a launch. Guards are posted there at night and some of them say they have heard crocodiles grunting.

The first job when the plane comes out of the water is to scrape the barnacles off the hull — they grow thick and fast in these warm tropical waters. As it has to be done while they are still soft and wet, all hands get on to it. We have to sit on the ground to do it, while shellfish shower down on us and we end the day smelling of dead fish. It is such a boring job that we pass the time singing all the songs we know and making up dirty parodies. Of course, one of the favourites is Tex Morton's "Beautiful Queensland" as this is hillbilly country.

There are new visitors in town, Royal Marines, Royal Navy and RAF off a Combined Operations ship. The port is very busy, so there must be something big in the wind.

Today, the 13th, is the second anniversary of my enlistment and all the youthful enthusiasm has long since worn off. All we are interested in now is when the war will end and we can get on with a normal life.

19 October 1944

I filled in my morning off yesterday by joining the queue outside the local Kodak shop, waiting for them to release the ration of film for the week. After a two-hour wait, I got a roll of 6-20 film so will take some shots of Cairns to show you. It was interesting sitting on the footpath, watching the passing parade of locals of all colours, aborigines, Thursday Islanders, descendants of kanakas, Chinese, Italian and Maltese cane farmers, and always hundreds of people in all sorts of uniform. On my next day off I think I will borrow a bike and do a bit of exploring, as the area looks interesting.

Great news about the Americans landing in the



Duty crew on wing of Mariner. Jack Borgert, right rear; (Cpl) Bill Bunford, second front. Others unknown, Cairns 1945. (Courtesy J. Borgert.)

Philippines, fulfilling MacArthur's promise that one day "I shall return". It is only a matter of time now before it will be Japan's turn to take what they handed out to us in 1941-42.

Work is still very slack and I have spent some days sunbaking on the wing of a moored kite out on the "line". So last week I put my name down to talk to the Education Officer about doing a course to prepare my brain to return to civvy life, which must be fast approaching. Unfortunately he was out.

About Christmas leave, I will have eight days recreation leave, two days unit leave and seven days travelling time, which is hardly enough to make the long trip worthwhile. If a flight came up it would be different. Keep sending the bundles of papers, as I read them from the first to the last page at night.

Today I had my first flight in a Martin Mariner, A70-9, when it went up on a test flight after I had worked on it. We were airborne for an hour and ten minutes, including one "circuit and bump". We flew out over the Great Barrier Reef which, from the air, is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. The colours are unbelievably pretty and as vivid as a page from the *National Geographic* magazine. As usual I was airsick, as it was bumpy over the land.

5 November 1944

After sitting in the sun all day yesterday reading on my day off, I was sick of camp, so at night went to a dance at the Army Services Club, a few miles out of town in a suburb called Balaclava. The dance hall adjoins a big three-storey recreation building, said to have been left behind by the Yanks, and it is certainly up to their standard. They should leave behind more facilities like that. On the way back in the Air Force truck we picked up some Yanks and tried to teach them the words of "Waltzing Matilda", or at least those of us who knew the words did.

During the week I saw *Mrs Miniver* again in town and also an excellent feature called *China Fights On*. It brought home to me what the Chinese have been going through for

the past seven years at the hands of the Japs. If you don't hate the Japs when you go in, you certainly will when you see the atrocities shown in the film.

The cooks outdid themselves for tea tonight — cold ham, beetroot, onion, grated carrot and cheese, creamed potato and small fresh scones. We expected to see a high-ranking visitor walk through the mess!

The weather has been showery so the start of the wet season must be close. When it is so hot and humid the temptation to have a swim is very strong, until you think of the possibility of a croc or shark making a meal of you, as one tried to do of a pilot a couple of years ago.

[Wing Commander A.G.H. Wearne, DSO, DFC, of 43 Sqn had his leg taken off above the knee by a shark. He later resumed flying with a "tin" leg. It was my good fortune, many years later, to serve under him at RAAF Base, Fairbairn, ACT in 1954-56 and again at RAAF Base, Rathmines, NSW in 1959-60. He was a brave and deservedly popular officer.]

14 November 1944

"Wot! Another letter?" Well, I can't fit much into the three page limit. Yesterday, on our half day off, for sport we were taken to a beautiful spot on the Barron River called Barron Waters where the river leaves its gorge. Jungle-covered hills rise straight up and the railway line to Kuranda and the Tablelands curves around the mountainside. We took the opportunity to give one of our corporals, who doesn't wash too often, a compulsory bath — we call him "Tojo". I took a few snaps to let you see how beautiful it is.

Last week I joined the School of Arts library (it's only five shillings a quarter) so that I have something to read when I have finished the papers. We now work 12 days straight and then get two and a half days off per fortnight, so may be able to visit other towns on leave; however it will make filling in the time more difficult. I looked in the shops for Christmas presents, but without clothing coupons I wouldn't get very far, so that lets me off with a good excuse.

From what I read in the papers, Sydney seems to be a

place I would be ashamed to admit I came from, even if I did. I am tired of reading about strikes — don't they know there is a war on? No one seems to give a damn how long the war lasts as long as the Yanks finish it off for them. The heat wave and drought in the Riverina and the dust storms must be heart-breaking. They ought to conscript the strikers for work on the farms and let them slave for a living.

I will send a £5 money order with this and should have over £200 in the bank by Christmas. "Lord, how the money rolls in!" I have been keeping it in my money belt since I lost my wallet.

I am on an 80-hourly inspection of the tail assembly of A70-2 at the slipway. After lunch the metal was too hot to touch, so I went exploring up some of the mangrove creeks in a dinghy. The only sign of life was the mudskippers, which have small legs in front instead of fins. I don't know what I'd do if I came across a croc.

When we were putting A70-2 back in the water, the beaching gear pierced the hull. With four others I spent the night operating the bilge pump to stop it from sinking while we removed the fuel cell from under the floor so that we could get at the damage to repair it. After 24 hours on duty we were given the rest of the next day off.

27 November 1944

I have just been to church and by the time the sing-song and cuppa after the service was over it was 10 p.m. The night is very still, just like those summer nights on the farm when we used to play outside till it was too dark to see. It is over three weeks since it has rained and the minister prayed for it. I wonder if he will pray for it to stop when the "wet" begins!

Last night, with two mates, I saw *Streets of New York* and *Sunset Serenade*. We had a 45-minute wait for tickets and the entire audience was in uniform.

One of our squadron mascots has just had four pups and every few minutes the boys check on their progress. Someone suggested we should raffle them to raise money for our Unit Welfare Fund, which is a novel idea. The father, "Jeff", is a black kelpie and is always first on and first off

the launches, where he stands like a figurehead, drenched in spray.

Lately the cooks have been placing the day's menu outside the mess and it is a bit of a joke comparing what they promise with what we get. This morning it said "Savoury Vegetable Meat Pie", which turned out to be tinned M and V. Still, you can't blame them for trying to disguise good old M and V, which we hate.

As I write some of the boys are staging an impromptu concert near our hut. It's hard to concentrate so will drop in for another yarn from this part of Aussie later on.

P.S. I haven't forgotten John's 14th birthday today and will send him a ten shilling postal note.

#### 4 December 1944

My mind is a blank! How am I going to fill three pages? I have just finished ironing, a job I hate more than anything else and look forward to the day when someone else does it for me. You know that as soon as you put them on you are starting the whole cycle over again. I like the sight of washing on the line and the lovely fresh smell when you bring it in, but ironing!!! I'd never make a housewife.

I went for a walk along the "beach" near our camp, or I should say "mud", as the tide was out. There were quite a few civilians out, but I have heard that there are real beaches further up the coast and may go up that way on my next leave weekend.

I have been reading in the papers you sent the accounts of the experiences of the prisoners-of-war rescued from the Japs. Poor devils, I wonder how many will still be alive by the time they are all released. People seem to forget that they are our own flesh and blood. I often wonder if Mrs Maddern's (with whom I boarded during my last term in Armidale) son-in-law, who was in the 8th Division in Singapore, has ever been heard of. Their son was 11 months old when I was there, which would make him three now. How would he ever understand about his father?

Thanks for your letter, Dad. Don't overdo the

overtime, even if, as you say, it is your contribution to the war effort, otherwise you will be more of a slave than you were on the farm. Also, don't worry so much about what I do and the imagined dangers. I am at no more risk than you are, operating factory machinery.

#### 10 December 1944

I have just returned, with two mates, from my first weekend leave at Mossman, a small sugar town about 50 miles up the coast. It turned out to be one of the most interesting trips I have ever had.

We went by Hayles' Service Car, who also do the trip to Green Island. We passed through miles of cane farms with narrow gauge train lines branching out into the canefields. Then the road winds through bush before coming out on the edge of the Coral Sea, which it follows along sandy beaches for another 20 miles. After a stop at a small roadhouse for morning tea, we passed through more bush until, six miles from Mossman, we detoured into the old, abandoned mining town of Port Douglas, now a ghost town with derelict houses and shops.

On arrival in Mossman at 11.30 a.m., we booked into the Queens Hotel and, after a good dinner, set off for the local swimming hole, only 400 yards out of town, in Mossman Gorge. There is a beautiful crystal clear pool, surrounded by thick scrub, and in the cool water it seemed as if camp never existed.

On Friday night we went to a children's Fancy Dress Ball in the town hall and next morning spent a fascinating few hours outside the hotel listening to the local old characters telling stories. One 90-year-old bullocky had us in fits, telling us how his humpy had burned down and all that he had left was his pet cockatoo. When the shops closed at 12.30 the main street was suddenly deserted.

We learned that there was a dance and euchre party at night, so one of my mates rang the hospital to see if there were any off-duty nurses who would partner us. He asked to speak to a Sister Robinson, on the off-chance that there

might be a nurse of that name. Instead, the matron answered the phone, and did she give him a flea in the ear! Anyway, it turned out to be a pretty tame affair.

The return trip was beautiful, travelling in the big open car along the ocean with small islands just offshore. Even though the road was dusty, bumpy and winding, I was pleased that I did not get car sick.

So, "as the sun sinks slowly in the west, this is James Fitzpatrick saying farewell from marvellous Mossman".

20 December 1944

The year has flown and here it is, a few days before my third Christmas in uniform, with another set of memories and experiences behind me. I hope you enjoy your holiday at South-West Rocks, especially the surfing and the surf club dances.

We have been on tinned rations for weeks now and they say the cooks are saving the fresh food for Christmas dinner. Santa Claus has already been in the form of a parcel from the Australian Comforts Fund with a wonderful array, including this writing paper, toilet articles, tinned cake and pudding and other useful items. It's really a bit embarrassing as we are so close to civilisation. I hope that servicemen and women in worse circumstances don't miss out. My parcel was paid for by the Barcaldine Women's War Fund, in western Queensland, so will send them a thank you letter.

We will have Christmas Day off but work as usual otherwise. Have a bright and happy Christmas and may 1945 see peace at last.

26 December 1944

Well, here is how I spent Christmas 1944. On Thursday night I went to the RAAF Christmas Ball at Balaclava and had the best time yet there, but got a soaking while walking back to camp in a sudden cloudburst. On Friday and Saturday afternoons and on Sunday night I went to the pictures yet again with some mates.

On Christmas morning my hut-mate and I went to 9.30 a.m. Holy Communion and the church was full of

servicemen and women of every branch and nationality including Americans, and Javanese of the Netherlands East Indies Army and Air Force. It gave me a wonderful feeling and seemed very symbolic of what the war is all about.

We began Christmas Day with bacon and two fresh eggs for breakfast. As I had been given a meal ticket for the TOC H Services Club dinner, I went there with a mate for a dinner of soup, turkey, baked potato and pumpkin, steamed pudding, dried fruits, cordial, etc. In the evening we had our own 41 Squadron Christmas dinner and were served by our officers. Believe me, it was a beaut. The menu was cream of chicken soup, roast turkey, pork, ham, baked vegetables, and Christmas pudding. Our beer ration was half a bottle of lager and when that ran out an 18-gallon keg of Cairns beer was tapped.

We then adjourned to our recreation hut on the water and the boys put on an impromptu concert, helped along by another four "eighteens". It was a memorable Christmas.

Tonight I opened your Christmas cake and it is the best yet. I thought of you and wondered how you were spending the day. I envy you but suppose my turn will come again one day, probably about 1947. I will still be only 23 and young enough to enjoy life.

At times when I have nothing to do except lie on my bed and think, which is quite often, I do a lot of reflecting on life, both past, present and particularly future and think what a big, frightening thing it can be.

2 January 1945

Will this be the year the war ends? We all hope so. New Year's Eve was dead here, so went to the pictures and saw *Casablanca* for the second time. It was our long weekend so spent it spine-bashing in the hut, except for a swim at Barron Waters.

It is still very hot and dry, relieved by the ever-present sea breeze, which makes it bearable. I have a lifesaver's tan, working in shorts only. I like to go for a row on the inlet at dinner time, but not being able to go in the water to cool off spoils it. The Army health unit keeps the mosquitoes under

control by spraying DDT, so malaria is not a danger, but we have to be careful of dengue fever, scrub typhus and dermatitis.

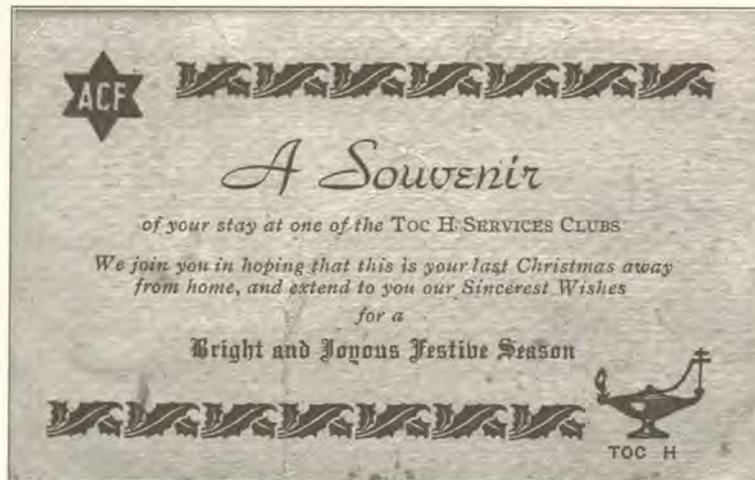
When I am working in some of the confined spaces inside the Mariners, with no ventilation, the sweat pours out and runs in rivulets down the floor. Outside the metal gets too hot to sit on or touch. We drink gallons of cordial and water which is brought to the slipway in milk churns. I plaster my food with salt to make up for what I lose in perspiration and must have lost a bit of weight up here.

I am getting a taste for pawpaws and mangoes which grow wild here, but my hut mates won't have a bar of them. Every house has them and the air is pungent with their smell. Another feature of the local flora and fauna is the huge cane toads, which were introduced to control an insect which damages the cane. You see them everywhere at night and the roads are covered with big black splodges the size of dinner plates where they have been run over.

The other day I learned what could have been a very expensive lesson about seamanship. After we had put Mariner A70-10 back in the water after an 80-hourly, I volunteered to stay on board and anchor it while we waited for a launch to tow it back to the mooring. Meanwhile we had dinner in the hut and when I looked out to see if the launch was on its way — no Mariner!

There it was, half a mile down the inlet drifting towards the line of moored kites. A couple of us got into the dinghy and rowed like mad. When we got aboard my mate pointed out that I had not paid out enough cable for the anchor to dig into the bottom. With the strong run-out tide it had dragged the anchor. The sergeant really tore a strip off me when he found out. Anyway, they let me go up on the test flight out over the Reef and I amazed myself by not getting airsick.

There has been a good song going round camp about the Catalina flying boats which used to be based here, sung to the tune of "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze". I managed to scrounge a copy and will enclose it.



*Souvenir of the last war-time Christmas dinner.*

*The Cat-Boats Are Flying Tonight*

They fly through the sky with a nonchalant air,  
With Zeroes they play like a tortoise and hare,  
And word gets around for the Japs to beware —  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

They hang on the bomb racks a dozen or more  
And 20-pound frags simply litter the floor,  
So start up the donks and we're off to the war —  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

With many a sigh for our warm little cots  
We thread our way out through the steamers and yachts,  
And take to the air at a full 60 knots —  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

After plugging along for an hour or two  
The skipper looks round at his trustworthy crew;  
The Observer's asleep, and the Engineer too —  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

Comes a break in the clouds and a light down below,  
The skipper has had it, so says "Let 'em go!"  
And mixed bombs and beer-bottles rain on the foe —  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

They head her for home, and the skipper retires,  
And dreams of the headlines next day that "The fires  
Were visible ninety miles distant" — the liars!  
The Cat-boats are flying tonight.

The clouds are clamped down on to Cairns like a vice,  
The Wireless Op. twiddles his dials once or twice,  
"I can't get a bearing, the set's on the ice"  
The Cat-boats have had it tonight.

The RPC's gone and the compass is swinging,  
But on through the night the great Cat-boat is winging,  
Then an engine cuts out and we hear angels singing —  
The Cat-boats won't make it tonight.

So down through the clouds on the old bank and turn,  
Then somebody yells and there's Cairns just astern,  
And down on the water the landing flares burn —  
The Cat-boats just made it again.

We lasso the buoy after fighting the tides,  
Then off into town for a quick one at Hides',  
And so ends one more of our hair-raising rides —  
The Cat-boats were flying last night.

Tho' dicing with death every day of our lives,  
We still find some time for our girlfriends and wives  
Whacko! When the two-forty hourly arrives,  
THE CAT-BOATS WILL NOT FLY TONIGHT!

21 January 1945

Another long weekend which I filled with the fortnightly  
squadron dance at Balaclava and tried out the local

Trocadero, plus a matinee to see Jimmy Cagney in *Johnny Come Lately*. This morning I spent spine-bashing under the mosquito net as dengue fever is prevalent again. Then I boiled up my towels to try to get the mouldy smell out of them, and got into an argument about the respective merits of Persil and Rinso. I prefer the latter. I scrounged some starch and made a neat job of ironing my drab shirts and trousers but don't get any ideas for when I am home on leave, Mum.

An interruption here as a giant beetle two inches long has landed on the floor. His legs are so strong that I had a job prising him off the floor. I hope he eats cockroaches.

I have just listened to the ABC news in the recreation hut. Isn't the war news great, with the Russians only a hundred miles from Berlin.

During the week I had a letter from my old mate Roy Partridge-Wall and the lucky cow is awaiting a posting overseas to a much colder climate, he thinks. [Roy eventually went to England to join a RAAF Spitfire squadron and after VE Day went to Germany with the British Army of Occupation. Why couldn't it have been me?] I also had a letter from Peggy to say that she has become engaged, so that's the end of that chapter. As they say, c'est la guerre, I suppose.

During the week we had a talk on post-war rehabilitation from the Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, who is touring the camps. I asked him about refresher courses for teachers as I will be pretty rusty, having had only one week of real teaching after a shortened course. He said that question had them worried as they were afraid many teachers would be unable to settle down, or would be looking for better jobs. He suggested I apply for a rehab course before the education department could grab us and throw us in off the deep end.

"The Wet" has begun at last and we have had 15 inches of rain in four days. When the flood water backs up at high tide, the slipway is almost inundated and we have to put a rope barrier around it to stop equipment and drums from floating away. I look twice at any logs floating past to

make sure they are not crocs. I have been on an 80 hourly on A70-8 on the hull group, which is a cow of a job as we have to pump out the filthy, stinking bilge water first. When I had signed for that in the E/E 77 I had to help attach the beaching gear to A70-10 and 11 which were due for 240-hourly inspections. This meant swimming around to attach it and hoping there weren't any sharks about in the murky water.

We have been trying out a new anti-fouling treatment to stop the barnacles attaching themselves to the hull. It is a black tar-like stuff, instead of the lanolin and beeswax which is eroded away after only a few flights.

5 February 1945

I am all smiles after receiving two letters today which arrived only two days after posting, as we now have a daily ANA DC-3 mail plane from the south, which comes through from Brisbane in the day.

We had another five and a half inches last night and it blew a gale, almost flooding the hut. The local paper is describing it as a real pre-war wet. It's impossible to dry clothes and our perpetually wet towels soon go sour and mildewed. Boots go white with mildew and even my money belt locked in my kit bag has green mould. There are only two of us in the hut at present as the other chap's tropical time was up and he went south for a course. As the other chap is awaiting discharge on medical grounds, I will soon be left on my own. I haven't made as many friends as in Maryborough because we had anything up to 30 in the hut and you got to know them all well.

On Saturday there was a break in the rain, so decided to have a look at Barron Falls in full flood. The train left for Kuranda at 3.00 p.m. and for the first few miles the line winds through the canefields, before starting to climb up into the ranges with magnificent views back over the Cairns district and lush green crops at every turn. Eventually it winds into the Barron Gorge, passing Stoney Creek Falls which you can almost reach from the carriage, joining the muddy Barron River hundreds of feet below.

A couple of miles from the top you get the first glimpse

of the mist from the Falls rising hundreds of feet into the air. The volume of water cascading over the first hundred feet is like the sea roaring and you can't see the other side for the thick mist. I went on to Kuranda Station which is noted for its beautiful fernery and flower gardens, where I had a cup of tea before leaving on the return trip at 6.30 p.m. This took only one and a half hours compared to three hours for the slow climb up. It was a worthwhile trip.

I hope to start my leave in two weeks time but don't know how I'll be travelling or when I'll arrive, so better not make any plans. Get a good stock of tinned food in, Mum, as the shock of eating fresh food may be more than my system can stand.

14 February 1945

I have just finished reading the last lot of papers you sent and was wondering how to spend the time till bedtime, so decided to write again. I have seen three pictures this week in camp, including *Holy Matrimony*, with Montie Woolley and Gracie Fields, which was a good show. Another was an open air show at a camp just out of Cairns, but the drizzling rain, the mozzies and other wogs made it hard to concentrate on *The Rats of Tobruk*, which was disappointing.

This has been our first sunny day for a month so have done some washing in preparation for the "big trip" which I can't tell you about here, but I am counting the sleeps. I picked up my pay in advance today so won't be short of money to enjoy my leave.

[*Later:* I have just been to the orderly room to check up on my travel and with a bit of luck could be home before you read this. My leave pass has approval for 17 days from tomorrow.]

Flying Down to Sydney

Diary 17 February 1945

Thanks to Martin Mariner A70-5 being due for a major overhaul at No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot at Lake Boga,

near Swan Hill, Vic, I am leaving at 10.00 tonight on a direct flight to Rose Bay, the flying boat base in Sydney Harbour. I can't believe that I'll be home this time tomorrow and my mates are very envious.

#### *Diary* 19 February 1945

I missed out on one of the canvas webbing seats and made myself comfortable on a pile of Mae Wests in the waist compartment, but would have slept on a bed of nails if necessary. After take-off down Trinity Inlet, we banked out over Cape Grafton with the lights of Cairns disappearing abeam. I took a while to settle down, partly through excitement and also listening intently to the two big 14-cylinder Wright Cyclone "donks", hoping that my engine fitter mates had done their job well. They were as smooth as the air through which we were cruising at 150 mph at 9,000 feet, where it was quite cold.

I slept fitfully until daybreak, which came around Port Macquarie. We had travelled 1,200 miles while I slept and in an hour would be over Sydney. Everyone was now awake trying to identify familiar landmarks from the unfamiliar perspective of the air. Soon we were descending over Sydney's northern beaches, came in over North Head and touched down on the mist-shrouded water of Rose Bay at 7.15 a.m.: 1,400 miles in nine and a quarter hours! This is the way to travel in the future!

We were taken ashore by launch to the jetty and I caught a tram to Town Hall Station, where the morning peak hour was under way. I felt like shouting, "I was in Cairns last night," but no one would have believed me. I caught a train to Bankstown where my amazed parents hurriedly got me a late breakfast. My father had saved his petrol coupons for my leave and we all spent the day at Cronulla Beach.

My leave was a frantic pursuit of pleasure: dances at Paddington and Glebe town halls, Artarmon Younger Set, Waverley Hospital Nurses' Home, a bank Social Club, and a night at the "Tiv" (Tivoli Theatre). I saw a girl home to Strathfield from one dance, missed the last train to

Bankstown, decided to walk the six miles, became lost in unfamiliar suburbs and eventually arrived home at 6.15 a.m. If my parents were worried, they didn't show it.

I was in the city every day, ate at various Services Clubs, had lunch with my parents at David Jones, and met the girl from Strathfield for lunch at the Baltimore Restaurant during her lunch break. [Then considered the height of fashion for a lowly aircraftman.] I went to Manly on the ferry "Barragoola", which had to weave its way through the battleships and aircraft carriers of the British Pacific Fleet.

All too soon it was 3 March and time to say farewell to my family, who had seen very little of me.

#### **Crawling Back to Cairns**

*Diary:* On Saturday 3 March I reported to the RTO at Central Station, only to find that the 10.00 a.m. troop train to Brisbane was full, and that he would try to get me on the 8.00 p.m. Brisbane Express. I waited all day in the city, but when I again reported there were no seats left, so I returned home. I was successful on Sunday's troop train, which was a sleeper. It had triple-deck canvas bunks down each side of the aisle, which was an obstacle course of kitbags and bodies. The middle bunk was let down during the day to enable the passengers to sit on the lower bunk. The officer-in-charge of the train was the veteran aboriginal AIF officer, Captain Reg Saunders.

We ate meals provided by the many women's voluntary organisations, Red Cross, Women's Voluntary Service, Volunteer Aid Detachment and the churches, on the platforms at Taree and Casino. After a 25-hour journey, we pulled into South Brisbane at 10.00 a.m. Monday, and after booking the next leg to Townsville, I went to Air Force House for a much-needed shower and a meal.

Thinking that I might be lucky enough to score a ride in one of our Martin Mariners, I went out to the flying boat base at Hamilton Reach on the Brisbane River. There was a U/S [unserviceable] Mariner there and I was told I might be

needed to work on it the next day. I returned to Air Force House to book a bed for the night and then went to the pictures to kill time, seeing *Standing Room Only*. When I phoned Hamilton on Tuesday morning, I found I was not needed so went to the army depot at the Exhibition Grounds and was allocated a seat on the 1.30 p.m. troop train to Townsville.

We had a tea at Gympie of curried beef. Next morning the whole train had gastro-enteritis. There were queues at the WCs in the carriages and, at the frequent stops, men scurried off the train and squatted behind trees and scrub. There was no fear of anyone being left behind as it was possible to run and catch up as the train moved slowly off.

After breakfast at Rocky [Rockhampton], dinner at St Lawrence, tea at the renowned voluntary canteen stop at Mackay, we reached the low bridge across the mighty Burdekin River in the early hours of Thursday morning, 8 March. The river was in full flood and ours was the last train to cross for some time.

I learned when we arrived back in Cairns that the next train, which was a stock train with four passengers in the guard's van, had stalled on the bridge when a brake hose broke. The driver took the locomotive to the other side to seek assistance. Meanwhile the rapidly rising flood waters forced the guard and passengers to leave the van. A stockman released some bullocks from the nearest truck and they attempted to reach the safety of the bank by hanging on to their tails. Three reached the bank half a mile downstream, but two were drowned. One of the boys said the water was only a foot below the rails when we crossed and by 9 a.m. it was ten feet over them. We were very lucky. [My wife, many years later when I recounted this story to her, said that she was returning to Townsville, where she was stationed at RAAF Garbutt at that time, and their train was diverted from Rockhampton out west through Longreach, Winton, Hughenden and Charters Towers to Townsville.]

We finally reached Townsville at 7.30 a.m. after a 42-hour trip from Brisbane, and at 10.00 a.m. began the final

stage. We were delayed by frequent washaways, had a meal at Innisfail which was so bad that even the army boys complained, and finally arrived at Cairns at 10.30 p.m. Thursday, in filthy dirty clothes we had been in for five days. Queensland Railways had lived up to their reputation.

#### Letters 8 March 1945

Well, as you can see I had an eventful return trip, which took 12 times as long as the flight down, so I am back to reality here. You have no doubt read of the tragic air crash off Cairns in which AIF General George Vasey was killed when the RAAF Lockheed Hudson bomber went down in the sea in bad weather.

One of our Mariners flew over to the Gulf today to rescue the crew and passengers of a Douglas Dakota which had belly-landed on a beach. Another two have just returned in the dark, landing by flare path, after searching for survivors from a ship which has disappeared in the Coral Sea. They sighted survivors in a life raft but it was too rough to land so they dropped them food before returning. [It was later reported that an Allied merchant ship had foundered in the cyclone and only 13 survivors had been rescued from a crew of 85.]

I feel a bit guilty, now that I am back, at not spending more time at home, but felt that I had to make the best of my limited time. I am also sorry that I did not wire you details of the delays as I know how you worry, but I am used to the uncertainties of service life now.

#### 25 March 1945

A good night for writing letters as it has rained non-stop for three days with a south-westerly gale, and the cyclone warning flag is flying from the Cairns post office. I have just read *Gone With the Wind* in two days, all 600 pages of it, and found it hard to put down. There are always lots of books and magazines circulating around camp and chaps are always dropping in to see if you have anything new to read, so the papers you send are very popular.

Before this wet spell began I went to the pictures with

an AWAS girl I met at a dance, and saw *Philadelphia Story*, which had three stars in it. Another night we saw *The Adventures of Martin Eden*, put on by a mobile army cinema, which was worth sitting in the rain to see.

I wonder how much longer the Germans on the western front will hold out now that the Allies have crossed the Rhine?

### 3 April 1945

Here are the rainfall figures for March: Cairns — March 50 inches, 100 inches this year; Innisfail — 65 inches in 25 days, 140 inches this year; Tully — March 73 inches; Ingham — 16.5 inches in last 24 hours, 25 inches in three days.

On Good Friday it was still raining so I went to Innisfail for our long weekend break. We got a room at the Queens Hotel and found the town was full of stranded travellers. On Saturday night we went to a ball in the Shire Hall, which is the best I have seen outside of capital cities and a reflection on the wealth of the area. Although there was a big crowd, competition for girls was not as strong as in Cairns. Unfortunately most were chaperoned by their mothers.

During the day the street was busy with people of many different nationalities, mainly southern Europeans, and it was rare to hear English spoken, while shop windows were full of displays of macaroni and spaghetti in all shapes and sizes. We stuck to a mixed grill for dinner.

We had heard a lot about a place called Paronella Park, a few miles out of town, so went out by bus on Easter Sunday, the road winding through endless cane fields. Paronella Park is on the side of a hill, where a Spaniard, Joe Paronella, has spent his life creating a tropical garden, through the middle of which run the pretty Mena Creek Falls. There is a rustic ballroom and kiosk where we had afternoon tea, before returning to Innisfail to catch the rail motor back to Cairns at 6.30 p.m. I enjoyed it so much that I plan to spend next long weekend there.

You must wonder whether I am doing any work as I have not mentioned it since returning. I am still on 240-

hourly inspections at the slipway and am currently on the tail group, a job I don't like as it involves perching on the end of a rickety ladder about 15 feet off the ground. You know how I hate heights.

The meals have been pretty crook lately. Even the flies have deserted the mess. I hope that one day tin-openers will only be found in museums.

I have tried to listen to the news every day since the big breakthrough into Germany. It is also encouraging to hear that the new Jap cabinet is not a war-like one, but that doesn't mean that they won't fight until Japan is invaded and their army is defeated. The big ships I saw in Sydney Harbour soon saw some action, didn't they?

### 23 April 1945

We had another tragedy here on Friday, April 13. The Cairns Harbour tug was assisting an Allied army transport out of its berth, when the tug got side-on and was turned over. One of our launches rescued two of the crew but the other two poor devils were trapped inside.

Then, on the way back from the slipway, word spread of the death of President Roosevelt, which we found hard to believe until we saw the flags flying at half mast. Everyone felt sad that it happened with victory in sight.

I have just seen *The Bride Came C.O.D.* at the camp pictures, which are held on some old tennis courts, right outside our hut. Last night I saw a good show in Cairns, *The Strange Death of Adolf Hitler*, and the support was *It Happened One Night*. Yes, that's right and a change from the usual Sunday night westerns.

The war news is still too good to believe and tonight Berlin is in flames from the Russian guns, but with the 100 German divisions reported to be in the mountains, V-Day will be a few months off yet. It should seem more startling than it does, perhaps because we have anticipated it for so long. There has been much activity around here lately and the Atherton Tablelands camps must be deserted. [I must again stress that references to military affairs in this chapter were taken from my diary, and not referred to in my letters, which were still being censored.]

It's raining again but I did my washing during a break. You can always bet on a couple of mates dumping their things in with yours as soon as you light up the copper. We often talk about our lives before we joined up and when I hear chaps talk about city life, I realise what I missed out on, especially in my social development. They had a flying start, whereas mine has only just begun, but overall I have few regrets.

3 May 1945

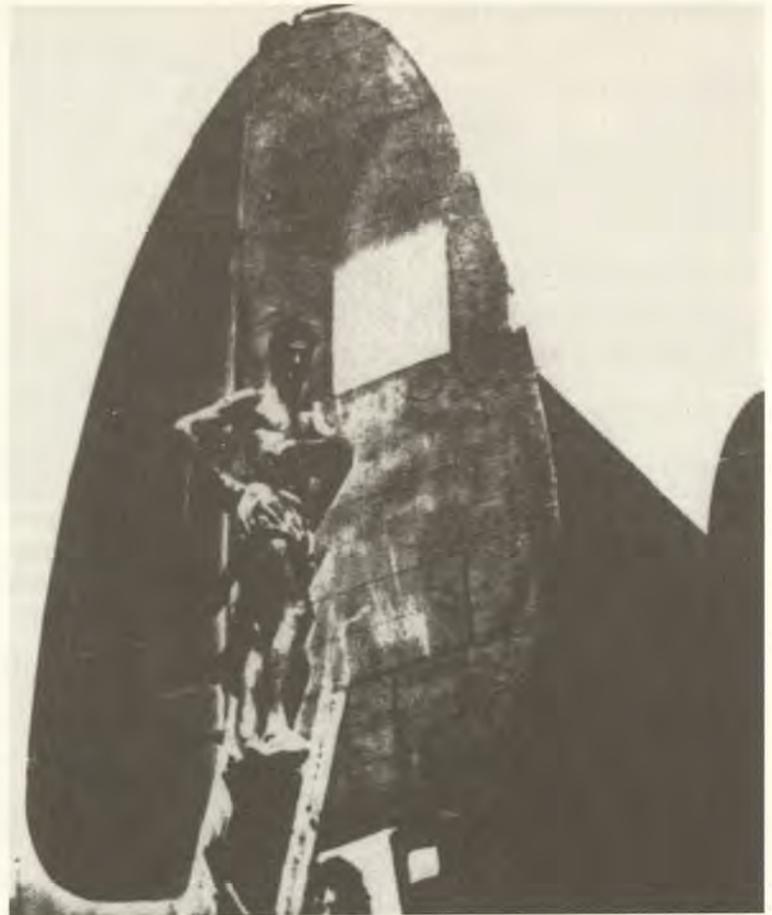
I have just come back from the airmen's beer garden where I had my weekly ration of two "Lady Blameys". A "Lady Blamey" is a beer bottle cut off at the shoulder, and named after the wife of the Chief of the General Staff, General Blamey.

Last weekend a truckload of us went to the beach at Yorkeys Knob for a swim. Some waves were almost big enough to shoot but the water was very muddy. So we had a "Troppo" surf carnival and mimed all the usual events, finishing up with an interstate March Past of Bondi, Coolangatta, Cottesloe, etc. It was a really funny turn and we were in fits laughing. With some mates, I went to Innisfail again on Saturday afternoon, but as it was still raining we returned on Sunday. When I returned to camp I would have liked to have gone to church, but could not find a mate to go with.

Isn't the war news wonderful, with Milan, Turin and Venice in our hands and Musso [Mussolini, the former Italian dictator] shot, and rumours of peace negotiations with the Germans. Also the AIF are back in action with the landings in Borneo. The paper boys have been bringing the Brisbane morning papers around as they now come by air, so we can keep right up to date.

*Diary 6 May 1945*

The war in Europe is very close to the end, with one million German troops in north-west Germany, Holland and Denmark surrendering to "Monty" [Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery]. Peace negotiations are going on in Czechoslovakia and Austria, as well as in Norway. Hitler's



*Author inspecting fin and rudder during 240-hourly inspection of A70-11 on the slipway.*

mountain headquarters at Berchtesgaden has been occupied by the US Army.

*Diary 7 May 1945*

The remaining German forces have surrendered and Churchill is standing by to make an official announcement in a day or so, perhaps sooner.

*Diary Tuesday, 8 May 1945*

The war in Europe is over. Mr Churchill is to speak at 11.00 p.m. Tomorrow is a public holiday, but I am rostered for duty crew. I am writing this after hearing the Armistice speech by Winston Churchill and our own leaders. There is no wild rejoicing, just a great feeling of relief that at least the first part is over.

*Diary 9 May 1945*

Today is the official VE Day holiday to mark the end of the Nazi regime, but I have to work, slipping two kites and putting two others back in the water at high tide. Now to finish the Japs off!

*Letters 14 May 1945*

I have just seen Abbot and Costello in *Rio Rita* at our open air camp show and a round-up of *Australian News From Home* for the troops. It's a perfect night and recent days have been hot and clear, just the kind of weather to escape from a southern winter when things are back to normal.

I spent the day off in lieu of working on VE Day, at Innisfail with a mate. It was nice to sleep between sheets in a proper bed and to have nourishing meals, such as the one we had at Paronella Park — roast chicken and the works, and Mr Paronella kept plying us with more, all for four shillings. Guess what we had for tea back in camp? Good old M and V! Our VE Day dinner was even less memorable. Everything came out of a tin, just to remind us that there is still a war on, I think.

I have just heard of the electricity strike in NSW, and know that there MUST be a war on.

I was up at 4.15 to catch the high tide and put two Mariners back in the water, and hoped there weren't any "Noahs Arks" nosing around the slipway as I took the beaching gear off. When I was working out on the water last week I saw a seven foot hammerhead shark cruising around below. It sure makes you careful not to drop any tools in the water, as we have to pay for any we lose and I wouldn't be diving in after them.



*Airmen's beer garden on Esplanade, Cairns, Queensland, built by airmen of Catalina squadrons.*

There are 25 US LSTs [Landing Ships Tank] in port so there must be something big on up north. There were brawls between the crews and the AIF, until the Aussies armed themselves with thick lengths of sugar cane and cleared the streets of Yanks.

I had a 40-minute flight in A70-8 after working on the flight deck and controls inspection group and, as we shot up Yorkeys Knob beach, I was sick again. We have been working from 7.00 a.m. until 6.00 p.m. recently to get all aircraft serviceable. There is a furphy going around that 41 Sqn is to be disbanded soon and some of the Mariners will form 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight, while the rest of us will go to 40 Squadron, which flies Short Sunderlands as transports.

*4 June 1945*

We are still working long hours which must be helping to push the Nips back on Luzon (Philippines). Last week I saw the newsreels of the German slave camps at Belsen and Buchenwald. I never thought that I'd live to see human beings in the state the survivors were in. You feel that no



*Author, Murray Saint, Bob Harbord and Bill Clark on leave at Innisfail, Queensland.*

punishment for those responsible could ever be adequate. We were all stunned into silence, as there is usually a bit of chacking during the newsreels. You could have heard a pin drop in the theatre.

Last weekend a few of us went to Innisfail again, but it was another wet weekend, and they had had 18 wet days in a row.

#### *Diary 22 June 1945*

On the 20th I was asked to report to the orderly room, to be told that my discharge application was waiting to be signed. This really bowled me over, but after some thought I decided that, as the squadron was to be broken up and the war could not last more than another few months, I should agree to my early release to return to teaching.

So now everything I do here will be for the last time — a final trip to Innisfail, a last day working at the slipway and a row up the mangrove creeks at dinner time, a last beer night at the rec hut and a last look around Cairns.

#### *Diary 3 July 1945*

I spent yesterday getting cleared from the various sections, and at night sat in drizzling rain in camp to see *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, a very funny show. Today I had my last meal in town as I could not face up to M and V again. Tonight the boys put on a farewell party for me and I said goodbye to all my mates of the last ten months, with whom I had shared so many good times. For the first time, the singing of "We'll Meet Again" really meant something to me. Tomorrow I am booked on A70-10 to Brisbane and my last flight in a Mariner. I have just finished packing my kitbag to be ready for an early take-off tomorrow.

#### *Diary 4 July 1945*

After picking up our skipper, Flight Lieutenant Phil Mathieson, we boarded "10" and, with all 30 passengers embarked, we slipped our mooring at 8.00 a.m. and took off. As I looked down on Cairns I wondered if, and when, I would ever see it again. I hope so, as I reckon it should be a beaut place in peace time.

We landed at the RAAF Flying Boat Repair Depot at Bowen, and on the leg to Brisbane I helped prepare a meal of steak, fried onions and mashed potato for the crew in the tiny aircraft galley. I was up on the flight deck for our descent on the Brisbane River at Hamilton Reach, where we landed at 2.00 p.m. After booking a bed at the Hospitality Centre, with more time to fill in, I saw *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, starring my favourite actress, Ingrid Bergman. I am booked on the troop train to Sydney tomorrow and have to report to No.2 Personnel Depot, Bradfield Park, to await discharge.

#### **Services No Longer Required**

I "lived out" (at home) for the next few weeks, reporting each day to the "Pool" for allocation to the various labouring jobs around this huge camp. Hundreds arrived daily to join the thousands whose services were no longer required

now that the expected invasion of Japan, which would be an all-American show, was imminent.

One evening early in August, on my way home by train, my eye caught a small item in red print in the Stop Press column of *The Sun* newspaper: "New Bomb Dropped on Japanese City" over a brief report that this new bomb, which relied on the power of the atom for its effect, had been dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. A week later, on 15 August, VP Day, the camp was stood down for the day, many joining the crowds which filled the streets in an uninhibited display of relief that, after six years, it really was all over.

On 29 August, my 21st birthday, I went with thousands of others to the flying boat base at Rose Bay, to welcome home the first RAAF Catalina-load of 8th Division prisoners-of-war of the Japanese from Singapore. We watched in stunned silence as these gaunt, hollow-eyed survivors were helped aboard buses to be taken to the army hospital at Concord.

I thought of my school and college mates who would not be returning, and the pilots and trainees whose death had touched me personally, and I recalled those famous lines: "I wept because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet."

I was discharged on 4 September and placed on the RAAF General Reserve for three years. I did not get to see my personal documents, but if I had I am sure that I would have found, stamped across them, a koala and the words: **Not To Be Shot At Or Exported.**



*A great feeling of relief – four very happy members of the WAAF in Sydney on VJ Day, 15 August 1945. Left to right: Gwen Tacon, Joan Symons (later to marry the author), Helen Paroz, Pat Orman.*



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE  
Certificate of Service and Discharge

Number 71221 Rank Leading Aircraftman  
Full Name SULLIVAN, Leslie Harold  
Date of Birth 29/8/1924 Date of Enlistment 13/10/1942 Date of Discharge 13/1/1947  
Occupation in Civil Life Student Teacher  
Reason for Discharge under the provisions of A.F.R. 115 (L) "On demobilisation"

Character on Discharge V.G.  
R.A.A.F. Mustering or Trade Fitter IIA  
Degree of Trade Proficiency: A B C

DESCRIPTION  
(on enlistment)

Height 5'10 1/2" Colour of Hair Dark Colour of Eyes Hazel Complexion Medium  
Marks and Scars or Wounds Small scars both knees  
Qualifications and Special Courses No. 128 Fitt. Cas. 11/12/42 3. STT 272/42 No. 229  
Tr. Fitt. Rigg. Cas. 20/2/43 1. ES 80/43 No. 114 Fitt. IIA Conv. Cas.  
18/9/43 1. ES 372/43

PROMOTIONS, REMUSTERINGS, Etc.

Rank	Date	Mustering or Trade	Decorations, Medals, etc.
Aircraftman Class	13.10.1942	Trainee Technical	Nil
Aircraftman Class	21. 2.1943	Flight Rigger	
Aircraftman Class	19. 8.1943	Fitter IIA	
Leading Aircraftman	22. 1.1944	Fitter IIA	

Remarks: Member of R.A.A.F. Reserve from 5/9/1945 to 12/1/1947.

Office of issue and date stamp  
Royal Australian Air Force  
Headquarters, Melbourne.  
21st January, 1947.

*W. M. M. M.*  
Air Member for Personnel

R.A.A.F. PRINTING UNIT

FOR NOTES SEE OVER.

R.A.A.F. FORM 1/1/43A, REVISED SEPTEMBER, 1943

## GLOSSARY

### METRIC MEASURES AND DECIMAL CURRENCY EQUIVALENTS

In these extracts I have retained the Imperial weights and measures terms as well as the currency values used in the original letters. For those unfamiliar with these terms I have set out below the more common metric and decimal currency equivalents. These include a US dollars to pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d) conversion table published in the Melbourne *Sun Pictorial* newspaper on 7 January 1942 and reprinted as a pocket card by the Melbourne department store, Treadways, of Bourke Street.

US\$ (1942)	£	s	d (1942)	AUS\$ (1993)
0.05			3	0.03
0.10			7	0.15
0.50		3	0	0.30
1.00		6	0	0.60
5.00	1	10	7	3.05
10.00	3	1	2	6.10
20.00	6	2	4	12.25
100.00	30	11	10	61.20

#### Length

1 inch = 2.54 cm  
1 foot = 30.5 cm  
1 yard = 91.4 cm  
1 mile = 1.61 km

#### Weight

1 ounce = 28 g  
1 pound = 0.45 kg  
1 ton = 1016 kg

#### Volume

1 pint = 0.57 l (litre)  
1 quart = 1.14 l  
1 gallon = 4.54 l  
44 gallons = 200 l

#### Area

1 acre = 0.40 h

#### Temperature

32° F = 0° C  
100° F = 37.7° C  
212° F = 100° C

#### Rainfall

1 inch (100 points)  
= 25 mm

## SERVICES SLANG AND RAAF JARGON

Beat up (shoot up)	To make an extremely low flight at very high speed over admiring spectators
Blues	Blue serge RAAF winter uniform
Blue orchid	A member of the RAAF — derogatory term used by the army
Bull ring	Drill square or parade ground
Circuits and bumps	To touch down and take off again immediately, to practise landings
Clearances (in and out)	Documentation of arrival at a unit; certification on posting that no undischarged liabilities exist
Close the hangar doors	Cease talking about work
Donk	An aircraft engine
Drongo	A flightless bird — derogatory term for ground staff
Dinner	The main midday meal
Eagles	Embroidered eagle badge worn on shoulders of tunic by airmen
Eating irons	Set of cutlery
Emu parade (emu bob)	To pick up litter
Flicks	The pictures or movies
Flip	A short flight
Foreigner	An unauthorised job for the member's benefit
Furphy	A false report or a rumour
Good guts	The opposite of a furphy
Goonskins	Working overalls issued to airmen and airwomen
Hourly (40, 80 and 240)	Periodic minor and major inspections to ensure airworthiness
Hussuf (housewife)	A small hold-all containing a mending kit
Kite	Any aeroplane, particularly an old one
Palliasse	A long hessian bag filled with straw to serve as a mattress
Panic (to panic)	To clean and tidy one's sleeping quarters usually on Monday night, preparatory to the Commanding Officer's inspection after the CO's parade on Tuesday morning
Pool	A reservoir of personnel either awaiting commencement of training or posting on completion, used for daily camp chores
Rooky, rookies	A newly enlisted member, the course undergone by a rooky
Scrounge	To acquire by begging, borrowing or some dubious means
Scrubbed	Removed from training due to failure,

Septics (septic tanks)  
Shiny bum

Short arm parade

Square-bashing  
Spine-bashing  
Spitfire  
Sprog  
Tea  
Tear a strip off  
Troppo

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACF  
ARP  
AWL  
CB  
CO  
DI  
DROs  
E/E 77  
LAC  
M & V  
RTO  
MO  
PORs  
SP  
TOC H

U/S  
VAOC  
WAAAF  
WAG  
WOD

cancellation of flying due to weather, etc  
Rhyming slang for Yanks  
One who works in bullshit castle, usually an officer  
Examination of genitals for evidence of venereal disease  
Drill on the parade ground  
Idly resting on one's spine  
RAAF Service Policeman (SP)  
Young, inexperienced airman  
The evening meal  
Severely chastise  
Mentally affected by staying too long in the tropics

Australian Comforts Fund  
Air Raid Precautions  
Absent Without Leave  
Confined to Barracks  
Commanding Officer  
Drill Instructor  
Daily Routine Orders  
Aircraft Maintenance Record and Certificate  
Leading Aircraftman  
Meat and Vegetable (tinned)  
Rail Transport Officer  
Medical Officer  
Personnel Occurrence Reports  
Service (RAAF) Police  
After Talbot House, a services welfare organisation founded in World War I by Rev "Tubby" Clayton in the UK  
Unserviceable  
Volunteer Air Observer Corps  
Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force  
Wireless (Operator) Air Gunner  
Warrant Officer Disciplinary

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### No.3 School of Technical Training, Ultimo NSW 1940-45

In order to cope with the unprecedented task of training the thousands of technical trainees who flooded into the RAAF, many of whom had not ever handled the simplest of tools yet had the aptitude for training, a three-level system of training was devised for the aircraft trades.

Technical trainees first underwent an eight-week course in basic fitting, in which the use of simple metalworking tools and machines, measuring and marking out techniques, reading of technical drawings, and basic electricity and magnetism was taught. For this purpose Schools of Technical Training (STT), often based on the Technical Schools in the major cities, were established. The first of these, No.1 STT, was formed at West Melbourne on 18 February 1940 and was followed by 2 STT (Canberra), 3 STT (Ultimo), 4 STT (Adelaide), 5 STT (Perth), 6 STT (Brisbane) and 7 STT (Geelong).

If successful, trainees were posted to undergo a course in one of the specific areas of aircraft maintenance: engines, airframes, armament, electrical and instrument systems. After a period of experience in these musterings at a flying unit or repair depot they returned for further training in more advanced systems. Much, but not all of this training occurred at No.1 Engineering School, located in the showgrounds of the Royal Agricultural Society (Victoria) at Ascot Vale.

No.3 STT was formed at Ultimo, a suburb on the outskirts of the business area of Sydney, on 26 February 1940, under the command of Flight Lieutenant DH MacIntyre. The school occupied part of Sydney Technical College on the corner of Jones and Thomas Streets, just off Broadway and adjacent to Railway Square. The initial establishment was 1,000 trainees and 104 staff. Two weeks later the first two courses began training: No.7 Trainee Technical (Group II) Course with a strength of 75 and No.1 Instrument Repairers Course with 18 airmen. Nine weeks later, on 8 May, No.7 Course graduated and a month later No.1 Course was available for posting.

Throughout 1940 the school expanded, taking over more of the Sydney Technical College campus for training purposes and for accommodation. On 19 October, an area which had been originally the Dairy Farmers Cooperative stables was taken over as a parade ground, while Headquarters 3 STT moved into the Westminster Hotel on nearby Broadway, near the Tooth's Old Kent Brewery. As the expansion in the number of courses and airmen and later women under training continued

over the next two years, 3 STT hired accommodation as far away as Bondi, where the hotels Bondi and Astra, and at Coogee where the hotels Coogee Bay and Oceanic were taken over as RAAF barracks. Nearer at hand the NSW Institute for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind in Darlington and the colleges of St Paul and Wesley in the University of Sydney grounds, just across City Road, were pressed into service.

During 1940 new courses were added, and by December the Trainee Technical Courses had reached No.51, while No.12 Instrument Repairers, No.10 Wireless Telegraphy and No.41 Wireless Operators were in residence, together with courses for electricians and coppersmiths, a pattern which became the routine throughout 1941 when the number under training reached 1,000. This expansion was only possible as a result of the skill and dedication of a handful of prewar officers, typical of whom was the adjutant when I was posted there for training in October 1942. Warrant Officer W. Bartlett was one of the identities at RAAF Richmond in the 1930s and was posted to 3 STT to be the Warrant Officer Disciplinary (WOD). His RAAF number was 32 and in the words of the old air force saying "he was in the RAAF when Pontius was a Pilot". On 1 August 1941, he was commissioned as Commissioned Warrant Officer and on 8 September began adjutant duties with the rank of Flying Officer. I can still remember the "pep talk" he gave us new recruits, advising us to have nothing to do with "these here prostitutes", as the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute, where we were quartered, was in an area where they plied their profession. I remember "Wally" Bartlett as a fatherly old chap.

When I was posted to 3 STT in October 1942 to begin No.128 Trainee Group II Fitters Course, I joined airmen and airwomen undergoing the following courses: Long Sperry Overhaul, Empire Flying Boat, Turners, Cooks, Fitter Driver Motor Transport Conversion, Teleprinters, Instrument Repairers, Electricians, de Havilland, Welders, Wireless Assistants, Fitter Motor Boat Conversion and Radio Location. This last course was secret as it trained radar operators and technicians in this new technology, using the resources of the Commonwealth Scientific Research Organisation located in the grounds of the University.

With the entry of Japan into the war the strength of 3 STT quadrupled during 1942, as the following monthly figures show: January 794, February 963, March 1,015, April 1,038, May 1,025, June 1,493, July 2,357, August 2,888, September 3,454, October N/A, November 3,392, December 3,257. My course, which began with a strength of 211 of whom 8 dropped out, contributed to the 659 who completed their training during December 1942.

As new needs arose, 3 STT and its equivalents in other states met them with such diverse courses as Vulcaniser, X-Ray Technician, and Selfsealing Fuel Tank Repairer.

After reaching a peak in late 1942, trainee strength stabilised at around 3,000 throughout 1943 and 1944. In the first six months of 1944, 2,665 commenced training and 2,112, including 135 WAAAF, completed

their courses. In May the Commanding Officer responded to rumours of a proposed move of the school to now underutilised army camps at Ingleburn, Dubbo, and Greta and Rutherford in the Maitland area, with a terse letter to his superiors at Training Group Headquarters. He proposed that if it was thought necessary for the school to vacate some of its existing hired accommodation around the city, it made sense to build on land in the University of Sydney grounds where trainees already occupied St Paul's and Wesley colleges. The rumoured move did not eventuate.

Another rumour which spread at about the same time, was that the Institute for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind at Darlington was to be returned to its rightful residents in November 1944. When this was confirmed by No.2 Training Group Headquarters (2TG) on 26 October, the next day the trainees quartered at Darlington went on a hunger strike briefly and refused to accept the evening meal. The press got wind of this and reported it under large headlines, but the CO was quick to reassure 2 TG that the report was grossly exaggerated.

When the Coogee Bay Hotel was allocated for the exclusive accommodation of WAAAF in December 1944, pressure was placed on airmen accommodation. As the CO pointed out to his superiors, although unit strength was 2,000 there was suitable accommodation for only 1,250. When 2 TG suggested that the problem might be alleviated by allowing those who had homes in Sydney to live out, the CO 3 STT pointed out that as the living out allowance was only three to four shillings a day this would not find much favour with airmen.

On 31 July 1944 a significant new course began when 47 members, ranging in rank from Sergeant to AC1, with an age range from 19 to 40, began No.1 Japanese Linguist Course. Only a few had any previous knowledge of the language and it was estimated that it would take up to one year for them to achieve sufficient proficiency to be profitably employed as interpreters. Professor Sadler, Professor of Oriental Languages at University of Sydney, with Misses Lake and Ackroyd from his department, were the lecturers. The officer-in-charge of the course was Flying Officer Wiadrowski, a Japanese linguist. (I had applied for this course while stationed at No.3 WAGS, Maryborough, Qld, but was not successful. I have often wondered how different my subsequent career might have been if I had been successful.)

In January 1945, the University wrote praising the high standards reached by the trainee linguists, and No.2 Course, comprised of members of the army, began training, followed in February by No.3 with 53 trainees, of whom 15 were WAAAF. To complete the story of this aspect of 3 STT's history, after completing 44 weeks of training it was felt that the No.1 Linguists had reached a sufficient standard for them to be employed as interrogators and translators. There is no doubt that they would have been fully employed in the months following the Japanese surrender a few months later.

No.3 STT celebrated its fifth birthday on 26 February 1945 and the

unit historian, in looking back over its achievements, commented that it had grown from 350 trainees to a maximum of 4,000, and that in that time 25,000 airmen and women and 5,000 staff had passed through its gates.

With the end of hostilities now obviously only a matter of months away, preparations for the dismantling of this huge training complex began. The last of 63 Wireless Assistants Courses graduated on 16 March 1945 after a total of 2,000 had been trained, while 141 Electricians Course saw its total reach 1,200. The anticipated July trainee intake of 113 would consist of 60 members of No.6 Japanese Linguists Course. The final courses in some categories of training were: Nos 21 Welders, 53 Propellers, 97 Instrument Repairers, 4 Divers, 52 Electrical Equipment Operators, 10 Fitters Motor Boat (Diesel), 2 Advanced Vulcanisers, 5 Carpenter Motor Body Builders, 29 Selfsealing Fuel Tank Repair and 15 B-24 Tank Repair.

The rundown in training enabled the hired accommodation to be vacated. St Paul's College was handed back in February, not without some protest, as the CO pointed out that it would involve 130 airmen marching one and a half miles for breakfast and the same distance back after tea. In July the Sydney Technical College buildings at Ultimo were being cleaned and rehabilitated in readiness for their return to the NSW Department of Education. In October the college was handed to the Post-War Reconstruction Section, where many of those who had been trained there would be prepared for re-entry into civilian life.

The hotels at Bondi and Coogee, of which many trainees would have fond memories, were "dehired" progressively: the Pacific on 30 July was taken over by the Royal Navy, the Astra on 14 August, the Coogee Bay on 24 August and the Oceanic on 19 September. The Unit History Sheet noted that the hotel proprietors were reluctant to take over their properties, whether because they had been on a good thing or whether they would have no clients is not mentioned. The Westminster Hotel was vacated on 4 September and 3 STT HQ transferred to Ultimo.

Amidst all this activity, the official history notes that there was a small informal celebration before the unit was stood down on 15 August to mark the Japanese Surrender. Finally, on 31 October 1945, after five years and eight months, 3 STT was disbanded, the classrooms and workshops empty, the messes silent and the barrack rooms and dormitories bare. Its training mission completed, it had contributed over 26,000 trained groundstaff to the operational effectiveness of the Royal Australian Air Force.

*[Australian War Memorial, Research Section, Series 64, Collection 40/1, Unit History Sheets, No.3 School of Technical Training.]*

## APPENDIX 2

No.1 Engineering School RAAF,  
Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria  
Showgrounds, Ascot Vale, Melbourne, Victoria.

### Military Occupation of the Showgrounds

World War II was only six weeks old when the defence authorities evinced an interest in the use of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria (RASV) Showgrounds at Ascot Vale for military purposes.

At its meeting on 17 October 1939, the Secretary of the RASV Council read a letter from the Defence Department stating that the Department proposed taking over the showgrounds and various buildings for which it did not intend paying any rental. The Department generously agreed to allow the continued storage of wool by various woolbroking firms and that the Sportsmen's Charity Carnival arranged for 4 November should be allowed to go on. The Department also intimated that it would vacate the grounds prior to the end of June (1940) so that arrangements for the 1940 show could proceed.

One year later, following the establishment of the RAAF No.1 Engineering School (1ES) at the showgrounds on 1 March 1940, the monthly meeting of the RASV Council on 12 October 1940 was informed that Major Coleman, Secretary of the Air Board, had telephoned to the effect that the air force would be taking over the whole of the showgrounds and buildings, and that it would not be possible to hold a show that year. Later the Assistant Director of Hirings called on the RASV Council Secretary to advise that the War Cabinet, after examining every other avenue, had reluctantly made this decision and that the Society would be fully compensated in accordance with the provisions of the National Security Act. The President of the Society told the Council that the matter must be looked at in the light of a war measure and that the best must be placed at the disposal of Australia when so required.

Six years were to elapse before another Melbourne Show was held at the Ascot Vale Showgrounds.

### Brief History of No.1 Engineering School, 1940-46

When No.1 ES began operating as an independent unit at the RASV Showgrounds, Ascot Vale on 1 March 1940, under the command of Wg Cdr J. McCauley, the first courses to begin were No.10 Flight Mechanics, No.3 Flight Riggers, No.23 Fitters IIE, No.20 Fitters IIA and No.6 Carpenter Riggers. When the school was disbanded exactly six years later the respective course numbers were No.565 Flight Mechanics, No.463 Flight Riggers, No.265 Fitters IIE and No.228 Fitters IIA, an indication of its contribution to the operational effectiveness of the RAAF.

The first two courses provided training in the basic skills involved in the maintenance of aircraft engines and airframes, while the fitter courses were conversion courses on to the maintenance of more complex

aircraft and usually came after a period of on-the-job experience in the field. In fact, some flight mechanics and flight riggers remained in those musterings throughout their service at a consequently lower rate of pay. Daily rates of pay were six shillings and sixpence (\$0.65) for a recruit and trainee technical, for a mechanic or rigger ten shillings (\$1.00) and for a Fitter IIA or E, eleven shillings and sixpence (\$1.15). This was increased to 12 shillings per day on reclassification to Leading Aircraftman (\$1.20) after a period of satisfactory service as an Aircraftman I. My pay book shows that this was free of income tax until July 1944, when tax of twopence per day was deducted.

By 1 June 1941 there was a staff of 46 officers and 3,064 airmen on strength, of whom 805 were on staff, 1,519 were technical trainees, 220 were in the "pool" awaiting training and 386 were awaiting posting on completion of training. To cope with this huge increase in training effort, the working week was increased in March to 60 hours. As I wrote in a letter home, every building in the showgrounds was put to some purpose and they resembled a large but very compact country town.

With so many men and later women with time on their hands after classes, recreational facilities were vitally important to maintain morale and keep such a broad cross-section of young people out of trouble. While the good people of Melbourne opened their hearts and homes at weekends, there was no dearth of entertainment at the school, as the unit records show. On 14 October 1941 the first No.1 ES revue was held, organised by the welfare officer, Flying Officer J.H. Darcy. Also in October, Group Captain Summers OBE opened a new theatre equipped with the newest sound equipment. Boxing and wrestling tournaments were staged and inter-unit sports were held, one on 17 June 1944 for RAAF and WAAAF on Flemington Racecourse being won by Headquarters (RAAF) and No.4 Wing (WAAAF). Concert parties came out from Melbourne with top celebrities such as the inimitable "Mo" (Roy Rene), soubrette Jenny Howard, the "King of the Hillbillies", a very young Bob Dyer, and most popular, the Tivoli Ballet. Films were screened nightly in the new theatre and for those who wanted to spend their spare time in more intellectual pursuits, the many welfare organisations provided reading rooms, writing rooms, games rooms and the inevitable "cuppa".

The contribution of long-forgotten voluntary organisations such as the Australian Comforts Fund, TOC H, Everyman's Huts, as well as the YMCA and the various church auxiliaries, deserves to be acknowledged and recorded.

Another training milestone was reached in September 1941, when the ten thousandth trainee passed out. On 8 December 1941, following the declaration of war against Japan, Air Raid Precautions and Defence Plans were put into effect and the tempo and variety of training increased. To the original technical courses were added courses for cooks, electricians, electrical fitters, motor transport drivers, motor boat crew, instrument repairers, drill and physical training instructors and junior

NCOs. With new aircraft flooding into the country and the formation of many new squadrons, by the end of June 1942 strength had reached over 4,500 of whom 3,405 were trainees. Two months later the respective figures were 5,082 and 4,027 and, with a monthly output of 1,500, the total since establishment had reached 20,000. Ten months later the total had passed 30,000.

### Training of WAAAF

With the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) in February 1941, the face of the showgrounds began to change. WAAAF Telegraphists began training and on 31 December 1942 there was a passout parade of 270. In early 1943 the first WAAAF Technical Trainees arrived and for the first time male and female mechanics and riggers were training alongside one another. On 31 May 1944, a trainee flight rigger, Aircraftswoman (ACW) Hazelton, presented a kitbag lanyard she had plaited as part of her training in rope splicing, to Lady Gowrie, wife of the Governor General, at a WAAAF parade at Merton Hall. The third birthday of the WAAAF was celebrated on 16 March 1944 with a march past of 300 led by Flight Officer E.M. McLennan, the salute being taken by Squadron Officer A.D. Herring, Deputy Director WAAAF. This was followed by a sports meeting, a dinner party and an ABC concert.

On 5 May 1944, 600 RAAF and WAAAF, each with their own bands, participated in a combined Allied Services March in Melbourne. The WAAAF were being included, if not always willingly on the part of the RAAF, in most service activities. It is seldom recognised two generations later by the proponents of women's liberation and equal opportunity, that their grandmothers were doing "a man's job" so long ago, even if their rates of pay did not reflect this fact.

Out on the showgrounds arena, now irreverently known as "the bullring", the champion horses and cattle of pre-war days had been replaced by a motley collection of obsolete aircraft on which the trainees practised aircraft handling and engine starting procedures at the end of their courses. When I was there in 1943, the aircraft would make a flying museum today envious: a Gypsy Moth, Moth Minor, Ryan Monoplane, Bristol Bulldog, Westland Wapiti and Hawker Demon. By mid-1944 these aircraft, even then considered museum specimens, had been consigned to the aircraft graveyard and in their place were current operational types such as the Boomerang, Kittyhawk, Bristol Beaufighter, Lockheed Hudson and later CAC Mustang and B-25 Mitchell. Throughout 1944 a recurring complaint in the unit records is the need for the replacement of the canvas hangars in which these aircraft were housed.

By March 1944, over 40,000 trainees had passed out of the gates and the number and variety of courses continued to grow. The Equipment Training School had arrived from Laverton and with it an array of courses, ranging from Equipment Officers to Shoe Stitching. Courses now included Carpenter General, Radio Telephony, Telephone Operator,

Industrial Gas, Aircraft Fabric Worker, WAAAF NCOs, Mustang Conversion, and a Drill Instructor Refresher Course.

One new group of courses reflected the progress of the military campaigns in the New Guinea theatre. Whereas new airfields on the mainland had been constructed by civilians working for the Allied Works Council, this was not possible in overseas theatres. The RAAF formed its own Airfield Construction Squadrons who went in with the landing forces as the Japanese were forced back westward along the north coast of New Guinea and out of the adjacent islands of the Netherlands East Indies. This led to a need for appropriately trained operators of heavy earthmoving equipment which had not been seen in Australia until the arrival of the US forces. Thus No.1 ES became responsible for the training of Works Fitters, Plant Operators and Stationary Diesel Mechanics.

Another course which reflected the multinational character of the training effort was the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Special Course. When the Japanese occupied the former islands of the NEI, many of the servicemen in the NEI forces, including substantial numbers of the indigenous population, escaped to Australia to fight on. Some of these underwent conversion courses at No.1 ES before posting to several "Dutch" squadrons which had been formed around a nucleus of NEI aircrew. One of these, No.18 Squadron, which operated B-25 Mitchell bombers from Northern Territory bases has, 50 years later, a very active NEI RAAF Association. It was also possible to see, around the streets of the showgrounds, the blue-grey uniforms of the RAF, worn by men who had escaped ahead of the Japanese from Malaya and who would have felt at home on seeing the RAF uniform worn by the Commanding Officer, Wing Commander W.P. Spinks, RAF.

When No.3 Special NEI Course passed out, the Director of Military Air Forces of the NEI presented two Dutch airmen with decorations. Sergeant P.R. Krvis was awarded the Bronze Cross and Private A.P. Wilmer the Cross of Merit.

Not all the activity recorded in the Unit History Sheets occurred at Ascot Vale. In March 1944, a bivouac training area was established at Wonga Park, then in the bushland to the north-east of Melbourne. This was to give trainees experience in defending air strips in the northern battle areas, against enemy infiltration and sneak attacks. In October 1944, two raids on the camp by parties from Ascot Vale were repulsed and the historian comments that the "camp defences were strong and well-defended". It was a different story, however, on 28 February 1945, when a raid staged by Squadron Leader Allinson and party at 2000 hours (8.00 p.m.), at the precise time that the guards were being paraded and allocated duties, was successful in taking the defenders by surprise. The officer-in-charge was taken prisoner and the remainder surrendered. War games should never be played by the rules because the enemy uses a different book.

On a lighter note, the unit history records that a newly devised incinerator-type latrine had been developed which was a distinct

advantage over the deep trench type. This appears to be an improvement on the well-known "thunderbox". That the training was not without its hazards was borne out when it was recorded that:

... a very courageous and unselfish act was performed by A20494 Leading Aircraftman McDonald B.A. in saving a fellow airman A28398 Leading Aircraftman Barkla A.D. from drowning in the River Yarra at Wonga Park on 30th June 1944. Both airmen were performing duties at the time. As a result a report by the officer-in-charge has been forwarded to the Royal Humane Society.

From a peak strength of 33 officers and 5,091 airmen and women on staff and under training in April 1942, numbers began to decline in 1945 and in April of that year the monthly output was 782 which brought the total trained to 55,437. The Unit History Sheets continued to draw attention to the high failure rate on the Junior NCO Course in the most recent of which the failure rate was almost 50%. Earlier reports referred to NCOs failing to arrive on time, poor motivation and low course morale.

#### Run Down of Training

When the war against Japan ended in August 1945, the strength of 1 ES was still 68 officers, and combined RAAF and WAAAF numbers were 3,430. Of these, there were 807 on staff, 148 in the training pool and 735 in the posting pool. It might be concluded that the end of the war had caught the training system by surprise, but obviously such a huge training machine could not be brought to a sudden stop. Even at the end of 1945, when all training had ceased, there were still 888 on staff, with 203 "lodgers" from other Melbourne-based units. At 31 December 1945, the total number of trainees passing through 1 ES had reached 58,675.

The last entries for 1945 are rather symbolic. A Messerschmidt Me 109 fighter had been "converted to scrap" and the Japanese Language School continued with 63 interpreters under training.

It was fitting that the last words in the Unit History Sheet for February 1946 should recognise the achievements of one of those great groups of voluntary women workers which did so much to provide a touch of home for tens of thousands of trainees who passed through the school. The ladies of the "Rosella Canteen", who operated what would today be called a take-away food outlet, received this commendation from the unit historian:

The Rosella Canteen, staffed by voluntary helpers, closed on 2nd February 1946. This band of helpers, under the control of Mrs L. Monod, has served the following since May 1940:  
Daily: 200 dozen meat pies, 280 dozen sausage rolls, 160 dozen bread rolls, 15,000 rounds of sandwiches, 80 dozen cartons of milk, and in summer, 900 dozen bottles of soft drink and 150 dozen icecreams.  
Weekly: 1,000 cakes and 60,000 cups of tea.

The efforts of these volunteers materially assisted the morale and well-being of all personnel who passed through the unit during the above period.

Before the showgrounds were officially returned to the RASV, arrangements were made for an Official Inspection Tour of the showgrounds on 15 January 1946. Accompanied by the Commanding Officer, Group Captain W.P. Spinks RAF and the Senior Administrative Officer, Squadron Leader H.T. Roper, the President of the RASV Council, Sir Charles E. Merrett and a party of 20 councillors inspected the area. Members were impressed with the manner in which the RAAF had adapted the buildings for the accommodation and instruction of many thousands of RAAF and WAAAF, with obviously every square foot of space being used, even to the erection of huts on a large portion of the arena.

Before they left the showgrounds, the visitors were given light refreshments in the Officers' Mess in the Administrative Building. As Group Captain Spinks would shortly be returning to England, the President, in expressing appreciation of the courtesies extended, wished him a very pleasant trip and invited him, if he again visited Melbourne, to attend the Royal Show to see the grounds being used in the manner for which they were originally created.

#### Post-war Transition

No.1 Engineering School was re-formed on 4 March 1946 as Ground Training School at RAAF, Forest Hill, near Wagga Wagga, NSW. In 1950 it was renamed RAAF Technical College in recognition of the commencement of training of RAAF Engineering Apprentices in 1948. In 1952 the name was again changed, to RAAF School of Technical Training, which today continues to meet, as its predecessor did over 50 years ago, the skilled manpower needs of the RAAF.

#### COMMANDING OFFICERS

##### NO.1 ENGINEERING SCHOOL, ASCOT VALE

1.3.40	No.1 Engineering School formed as a separate unit — Wing Commander E.G. Knox-Knight, OBE.
8.4.40	Group Captain J.P.J. McCauley
21.10.40	Group Captain J.H. Summers, OBE, ADC
6.1.42	Wing Commander DH Brown
24.2.42	Squadron Leader W.P. Spinks (RAF)
27.5.42	Group Captain C. Eaton, OBE, AFC
15.4.43	Wing Commander A.D. Carey, OBE
1.3.44	Wing Commander E. L. Chapman

- 3.7.44 Wing Commander W.P. Spinks (RAF)
- 14.1.46 Squadron Leader H.T. Roper
- 26.1.46 Nucleus Party, Ground Training School, Lodger Unit, No.5 Aircraft Depot, Wagga — Squadron Leader J.W. Symons, Detachment Commander
- 4.3.46 No.1 Engineering School reformed as RAAF Ground Training School, Wagga — Wing Commander E.L. Chapman

*[Brief History of No.1 Engineering School, RAAF Historical Section, Air Force Office, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, ACT.*  
*Unit History Sheets, No.1 Engineering School, RAAF Historical Section, Air Force Office, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, ACT.*  
*Commemorative Booklet and Programme, RAAF Wagga 1940-90. Group Captain K.V. Griffin, Officer Commanding, RAAF Base, Wagga.*  
*Minutes of the council of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria (1939-46).*  
*Speed the Plough — A History of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, Frederick Harwood Noble and Robert Morgan, 1981. Published by RASV.]*

### APPENDIX 3

#### No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School Ballarat, Victoria, 1940-45

##### The Empire Air Training Scheme

In 1939, with Britain vulnerable to air attack and outnumbered by the German air force, it was realised that more aircrews than could be provided from her own resources would be needed to meet the requirements of the Royal Air Force. At a conference in Ottawa, Canada in November 1939, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand initiated a plan whereby a continuous flow of trained aircrew would be provided by the three dominions from schools to be set up under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) which would meet not only the needs of the Royal Air Force but also their own needs.

Recruits would undergo an initial training course for aircrew before being drafted for further specialised training in one of the three categories, pilot, air observer (later navigator) and wireless operator-air gunner (later signaller). In Australia, three schools were established for the training of Wireless Operator-Air Gunner (WAGS): No.1 WAGS at Ballarat, Victoria, No.2 WAGS at Parkes, NSW and No.3 WAGS at Maryborough, Queensland, where trainees underwent a 24-week course as Wireless Operators (Air) followed by four weeks at a Bombing and Air Gunnery School.

##### No.1 WAGS Ballarat

When the EATS was launched in April 1940, one of the first schools to be

established was No.1 WAGS, which was formed at Ballarat on 22 April 1940 under the command of Wing Commander C.O. Fairbairn AFC. Wg Cdr Fairbairn had served as a regular officer in the Royal Flying Corps in World War I and afterwards in the Royal Air Force, where he was awarded the Air Force Cross. He transferred to the RAAF Reserve and was called up for duty to form No.1 WAGS. As it transpired, he was ideally suited for the task.

With a staff of four officers, 39 airmen and 77 trainees, training of No.1 Course began a week later. Initially there were no aircraft for the practical phase of training and it was not until 4 October 1940 that four Avro Ansons arrived from Point Cook and Canberra RAAF Stations. Unfortunately one of the Ansons crashed on 30 November.

The strength of No.1 WAGS increased rapidly throughout 1940 so that by the end of the year the total strength of the unit was 772 officers and men, with 78 trainees arriving in December and 82 completing their training. Airborne training received a great boost in January when two Douglas DC-2 airliners arrived, having been purchased from the US firm *Eastern Airlines* when it re-equipped with the more modern DC-3. Three more Avros Ansons also arrived in January 1941. By the end of April 1941, unit strength had reached 1,352 and six DH 82 Tiger Moths had been added to the number of aircraft available for airborne training.

In October the first Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) Wackett trainers were received, forerunners of the eventual total of almost 50 which were to become a familiar sight in the sky over Ballarat and unfortunately, on the properties in the area, as they had a propensity to make frequent forced landings. The Wackett was an Australian-designed aircraft intended for pilot training but its aerobatic qualities left a little to be desired and it was relegated to carrying a WAG trainee in the rear seat from where he communicated with ground stations.

With the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, the training commitment of No.1 WAGS was doubled with the unit establishment reaching 63 officers, 731 airmen and 1,200 under training by 31 March 1942, while out on the tarmac there were 31 Wacketts and two DC-2s. By July there were 1,844 airmen ground staff and WAG trainees, while the first members of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) had arrived. In addition there was a RAAF Nursing Sister, four civilian instructors and six civilian labourers.

Within 20 months of its formation, No.1 WAGS had trained 2,745 Wireless Operator-Air Gunners for the EATS who were now serving in squadrons in all theatres of the war. In addition, 624 Wireless Telegraphy operators had graduated from the school. This training effort was not without its cost in lives and planes. There was a fatal crash on 22 March 1943, when the pilot and trainee were killed in the crash of a Wackett at Brewster. Both occupants were killed on 20 February 1944 in the crash of another Wackett. Many forced landings occurred in which the Wacketts were damaged in collisions with trees or fences but without injury to the pilot or trainee.

Throughout 1943 the training effort intensified to meet the ever-increasing demand for aircrew in the prelude to the opening of the long-awaited "Second Front" — the invasion of Europe — the bombing of the German industrial heartland, as well as the needs of the war in the Pacific. October 1943 saw No.1 WAGS approach its peak strength with 70 officers, two RAAF Nursing Sisters, 109 WAAAF, 1,568 airmen including 568 trainees, four civilian instructors and seven civilian labourers. Out on the tarmac stood 35 Wacketts, seven DH 84 Dragons, 24 Avro Ansons and a lone Tiger Moth.

Such was the WAAAF contribution in the hangars, the stores, the messes, the radio rooms and the offices, that on 16 February journalists from *The Age* and the *Australian Women's Weekly* arrived to photograph WAAAF at work and interview them about their jobs. By 30 June 1943, the output of trainees had totalled 4,510, a mammoth effort by any standard.

### RAAF and City Good Neighbours

It might be thought that with such a large population of servicemen and women virtually on their doorstep that relations between the locals and the RAAF might be strained at times. That this was not so is evident in the Unit History Sheets, which describe the many ways in which the city and the service cooperated. This harmony was not disturbed when, for several months in 1943, several thousand US Marines were camped in the city, on rest and recuperation from the Battle of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

On 28 July 1944, 400 members comprising staff pilots, WAG trainees and ground staff, led by Sqn Ldr Drake, marched through the city in support of a combined Australian Comforts Fund and Red Cross Gala Appeal, which was reported a great success, the salute being taken by the Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford. Two months later, on 29 September, 450 members of the School marched to assist the Ballarat Benevolent Fund Appeal, the salute on this occasion being taken by the Commanding Officer. The hospitality shown to the RAAF by the towns-people was reciprocated when over 700 ladies from the various welfare organisations were entertained by the unit at a picture evening in the Station cinema. Again, on 11 December, a Unit revue of sketches, music and ballet was held in the cinema over three nights, to which the citizens of Ballarat were admitted, raising over £148 for Unit Welfare Funds.

1944 ended with a Christmas Party for children of RAAF personnel at which presents were given to 180 children by the Station Medical Officer as Father Christmas. These "good neighbour" activities continued into 1945 when on 16 March there was another march through the city in support of the Ballarat Hospital and Victory Loan Appeal, which drew a letter of appreciation from the Hospital Board for its outstanding success. The RAAF also fielded teams in local sports and in March the RAAF cricket team won the final of the Ballarat and District competition, with Leading Aircraftman Lenertz H.F. scoring 119 runs. A highlight of

April was a visit by the Avro Lancaster bomber "G-George" in support of a Victory Loan Rally with the reward of a flight in it for anyone who subscribed over £100. A total of £9,300 was raised but the last flights had to be cancelled due to fading light, much to the disappointment of those who missed out.

Unfortunately, the Commanding Officer who had done so much to foster these good relations relinquished his command of No.1 WAGS on 24 October 1944, on being transferred to the RAAF Reserve of Officers. Paying tribute to his outstanding record, the Unit History Sheet comments:

He has probably held command of one Training Unit under the EATS in Australia longer than any other RAAF officer and saw the Unit grow under his command from a mere handful of men to, at one stage, over 2,000. No fewer than 4,756 WAGs, Air Gunners and 185 Navigators "W" (Wireless) graduated during the period that he commanded the Unit. Many gained distinction and have since returned in instructional capacities to serve under him again. It is known in the RAAF that throughout the Empire the School stands high in regard to the standard of training achieved. It is therefore with regret that the Service, and this Unit in particular, has lost the services of so fine an officer, who is returning to civilian life in order to take up the control of his properties.

Now a group captain, he was replaced by Wing Commander W.J. Guthrie.

The development of new technology, particularly radar, created a need for additional courses in the field of electronics to prepare aircrew for its use in navigation, target location and bombing. This was met by the provision of a new course for navigators with a "Wireless" qualification, together with Avro Ansons equipped with Air-to-Surface Vessel (ASV) radar, and the replacement of the Wireless Operator category with that of "Signaller". So on 20 November 1944, a Radar Training Wing was established and at a graduation parade on 22 March 1945, "Signaller" half-wings were awarded to 57 graduates, while a month earlier the Commanding Officer had presented the last course trained as Wireless Operators with their half-wing insignia.

With the introduction into RAAF service of the longrange B-24 Consolidated Liberator bomber, three new courses were required: radar courses for navigators, air bombers and wireless operators. A large intake of officers and NCOs arrived in January 1945 to begin these courses and, on 16 March, 35 officers and 125 NCOs were posted to the Liberator Operational Training Unit at the sprawling "secret" RAAF Station at Tocumwal. March was, however, marred by the crash of a Tiger Moth, in which two Sergeant pilots were killed.

### Victory in the Air at Ballarat

May 1945 was a significant month in the history of No.1 WAGS when,

on the 9th, a "general stand-down" of all non-essential personnel was proclaimed to observe victory in Europe — VE Day — and flags were ordered to be flown from all available points. By the end of the month, all Wireless Operator (Air) training had ceased with the total at over 5,000, of whom 1,500 who had not reached the required standard of proficiency had gone on to training as "straight" Air Gunners. The Unit History commented that:

The School was represented in every war theatre, and its graduates' names on Honour Rolls and in Casualty Lists bear mute testimony to their achievements and sacrifices.

Three months later, the Japanese surrendered and the skies over Ballarat and district were eerily quiet for the first time in almost five and a half years. Again the Unit History Sheet for August 1945 shows how the end of this spectacular effort by No.1 WAGS was celebrated:

15 August: At 0930 hours news was received of the Japanese capitulation. Flags were flown and Victory Celebrations were planned. All non-essential personnel were stood down for two days. A special train left the unit siding at 1430 hours for Melbourne, giving personnel three days off the unit. 19 August: A Thanksgiving Service for Victory was held in the Unit cinema at 0830 hours by the Chaplain, Squadron Leader Ditterich. 31 August: A Victory March through Ballarat by the Navy, Army, Air Force and the RSL, involving four squadrons of trainees (700) and 70 WAAAF was held, the salute being taken in front of the Town Hall by the Commanding Officer, Wg Cdr Guthrie. Thirty Avro Ansons flew over Sturt Street in a "V" formation. Aircraft from Laverton were unable to participate due to bad weather. Rain, hail and snow alternating with brief periods of sunshine made conditions difficult but the march went ahead, a brilliant success. It was the biggest crowd ever seen in Ballarat and the crowd was wildly enthusiastic. Photographs were taken by the Ballarat Courier.

That was not the end of the story of Ballarat's association with the RAAF, as it was for the dozens of training schools established under the EATS. After a transition period, No.1 WAGS re-emerged as the RAAF School of Radio which, for many years until its transfer to Laverton in the early 1960s, met RAAF requirements for highly skilled electronic technicians and operators and numbered on its staff at one time the Olympic athlete and later administrator, Kevin Gosper.

[Unit History Sheets, No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School, Historical Section, Air Force Office, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, ACT. Douglas Gillison, Australia in the War 1939-1945, Royal Australian Air Force 1939-42, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1962.]

#### APPENDIX 4

##### No.3 Wireless Air Gunners School, Maryborough, Queensland

*Note:* The amount of useful detail provided for the aviation historian by RAAF Form A50 varies greatly between recorders. Nowhere is this more evident than between those of No.3 WAGS and No.1 WAGS. The difficulty with the latter was deciding what to omit; with the former it was finding enough of interest to form a picture of the unit and its achievements from the dreary record of officers' movements, courts martial and aircraft accidents.

My recollection of No.3 WAGS is that it was not a happy unit, which is a pity because with its location it had many advantages over Ballarat. It had the same function and operated the same aircraft, but there in part was the problem. The Wackett Trainer proved to be unsuitable for operations in the warmer air of Maryborough, which exacerbated its already marginal aerodynamic qualities and, due to engine overheating, caused it to be flown with the cowling removed. The record of forced landings and other incidents and accidents speaks for itself.

No.3 WAGS was formed at Maryborough on 18 September 1941, the third of three EATS schools responsible for the wireless operator training of the Wireless Operator Air Gunner aircrew category. (No.2 WAGS was located at Parkes, NSW.) On 22 September, Wg Cdr Cardale (RAF) was appointed Commanding Officer of the 8 officers, 32 airmen and 1 civilian instructor comprising the staff. No.19 WAG Course began on 15 October and passed out on 15 April 1942. A week later, No.20 Course graduated 40 Wireless Operators (Air), while 22 who failed went straight to Air Gunner training. By June 1942, strength was 21 officers and 854 airmen.

1942 was a disastrous year for the School. On 21 February, a Tiger Moth crash killed the pilot and seriously injured his passenger. DC-2 A30-5, was involved in an unspecified landing accident on 4 July. A day later Wackett A3-181 made a forced landing at Torquay on the shores of Hervey Bay, and the next day A3-182 collided with A3-184. Two airmen were struck by a lorry on the Pialba Road on 31 July, killing one and seriously injuring the other. On 15 August, Tiger Moth A17-2 was damaged in an unspecified taxiing accident, on the 20th, Wackett A3-183 was stood on its nose while taxiing, and on the 29th, A3-199 crashed while attempting a forced landing. Flying discipline literally hit a low spot on 7 September, when A3-198 struck a tent while low-flying over an army camp at Gympie. The last accident for the year occurred when A3-191 collided with A3-28 while taking off on 31 October.

There was no improvement in 1943. On 8 January, A3-190 force-landed on a beach at high tide, resulting in total immersion, while on the 21st, A3-26 crash-landed on the airfield. The last Wackett manufactured, A3-200, experienced engine failure on 24 February, and in an attempted



*Wackett A3-200 (last to be manufactured) after forced-landing on beach at Hervey Bay, Queensland.*

forced landing on a beach only 5 metres wide, ran into the sea. A3-195 was involved in a landing accident on 16 May. Accidents and tragedy were not confined to the sky and the roads; on 5 August, a Sergeant fell down dead in the Sergeants' Mess.

Meanwhile the strength of the school had grown to 38 officers, 495 airmen and 72 WAAAF, while trainees numbered 682. Thirty-five Wacketts flew a total of 1,140 hours for the month. Wg Cdr Cardale had been replaced as CO by a RAAF officer, Wg Cdr D.A. Connelly. A3-184 was again in trouble on 28 September, when it made a forced landing due to engine failure.

The School was honoured on 9 October by an official visit from Lady Gowrie, wife of the Governor-General, and party, who arrived in Lockheed Hudson A16-22 and after inspecting the Station, was entertained at a Dining-In by the CO and officers. A month later, OC No.2 Training Group, Gp Capt F.W. Scherger, with the COs of No.1 and No.2 WAGS and staff officers, arrived for discussions with the CO.

On 16 November, two seriously ill airmen were evacuated from Fraser Island to the Station Sick Quarters with suspected malaria. Flying accidents continued with A3-21 crashing on the banks of the Mary River on the 26th, badly damaging the aircraft but causing only minor injury to the pilot and trainee. The pilot of A3-34 made a skillful forced landing on the airfield on 6 December, when he experienced loss of elevator control at 1,200 feet and used throttle, trim control and flaps to return.

Flt Lt T.G. Janes, who achieved some post-war notoriety when he attempted, unsuccessfully, to shoot down a runaway pilotless Auster

Archer from the back seat of a Wirraway off Sydney Heads on 30 August 1955, commenced duty as adjutant on 4 January 1944. A3-76, while making a low landing approach to the airfield, struck a tree, damaging the wing leading edge on 12 January, and next day another fatal accident occurred, which I have described in my letter of 17 January in more detail. The run of accidents continued in February, with A3-158 making a forced landing in a paddock with ignition trouble and, on 17 March, A3-29 made a forced landing in a swamp near the mouth of the Burnett River. The WAG trainee, LAC Hesse, bailed out, but the pilot, by then too low to do so himself, successfully put the Wackett down (my letter of 20 March).

By the end of March 1944, the 43 Wacketts on strength had been joined by 8 Avro Ansons, 5 DH84 Dragons and a Tiger Moth which flew, in order, 1,629, 109, 260 and 18 hours for the month. Earlier in that month, 117 trainees had been posted to No.1 Embarkation Depot and 23 arrived to begin No.48 WAG Course. On 17 April there were two forced landings when A3-71 force-landed near Pialba due to engine failure, and



*Avro Lancaster, Q-Queenie, at Maryborough on Victory Loan Tour.*

A3-192 with a similar problem a few kilometres away near Urangan resulted in trainee LAC Clifford suffering a fracture of the 6th vertebra.

Attention was diverted from these problems on 21 April when Lancaster bomber "Q-Queenie", captained by Flt Lt Peter Isaacson DFC, arrived with the Acting Prime Minister, Mr Frank Forde, on a Victory Loan tour (my letter of 24 April). Engine trouble over Pialba caused the pilot of A3-38 to make a forced landing on 13 May without injury or damage. The pattern was varied on 5 June, when Avro Anson MG-728, in bad weather, was put down on Gympie showground. The undamaged Anson had to be dismantled as there was insufficient space for take-off.

The next day, A3-70 made a forced landing on the beach at Scarness, damaging the airscrew, and the following day a visiting Lockheed Ventura ran into a fence when it aborted a take-off.

No reason is given in the History Sheet for the District Court-Martial of four NCOs, nor of the verdict and sentence, if any. A comment on the Wackett's predilection for not remaining airborne is provided by the entry for 22 June, when 60 ARP Wardens and Civil Defence volunteers visited the Station for lectures on the removal of injured aircrew from crashed aircraft. The long-suffering residents of the Hervey Bay area must have been very blasé about Wacketts landing in their paddocks and on their beaches. Despite their poor serviceability, the Wacketts flew 1,240 hours in June, but the end was in sight when, on 24 August, a reduction in training was signalled from AFHQ, pending their proposed transfer to No.1 WAGS.

Over 7, 8, and 9 September, four NCO pilots appeared before a District Court-Martial. Again the charges, verdict and sentences are not recorded. Disbandment began in September 1944, when on the 25th, 35 Wacketts departed for Ballarat, via Narromine, NSW. Unfortunately only 34 arrived, as one made a forced landing near Oakey, Qld, due to excessive oil consumption, and was severely damaged. Wg Cdr Guthrie had taken over the skeleton staff of 11 officers, 53 airmen and 32 WAAAF left behind.

#### Radar School

This was not the end of the story for RAAF Station, Maryborough. On 30 November, the Radar School was moved there from RAAF Station Richmond and was soon in full production, with 335 under training, including USAAF and NEI personnel, and instructors were lecturing from 30–40 hours per week. There were many complaints to higher authority about the unsuitability and unserviceability of much of the training equipment and of unsatisfactory messing provisions.

By May 1945, B-24 Radar training had ceased but RAAF and WAAAF radar mechanic training continued. HMS *Nabstock*, a Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm shore station, arrived on 31 May with a complement of two squadrons of Vought Corsair fighters expected. The CO complained to his superiors of the impossibility of conducting lectures in close proximity to these high-powered and noisy aircraft, and of overcrowding in the barracks. Consequently, remaining ground courses were transferred to Ballarat, and a month later Royal Navy training ceased. All training finally ceased on 12 October 1945.

*[Unit History Sheets, No.3 Wireless Air Gunners School, Historical Section, Air Force Office, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra ACT.]*

## APPENDIX 5

### No.41 Squadron RAAF

#### Formation

No.41 Squadron was formed at Townsville, Qld, on 21 November 1942, under the command of Squadron Leader John MacL Hampshire DFC. The initial establishment was 16 officers, 62 NCOs and 115 airmen. It was tasked with flying high priority personnel and freight between North Queensland and Port Moresby, Papua, a flying time of four to five hours under normal circumstances.

Initial equipment consisted of two Short Empire C Class flying boats which the RAAF had impressed from Qantas at the outbreak of the war. Numbered by the RAAF A18-13 and -14, both aircraft were already veterans of the evacuation flights from the former Netherlands East Indies (NEI) in the early stages of the Pacific War. In fact A18-13, flown by then Flight Lieutenant Hampshire, had participated in the last minute evacuation of RAAF staff from Ambon in February 1942.

In their less warlike role their average loading was a varying mixture of up to 30 passengers and/or 6,000 lbs (2,720 kg) of freight. Interspersed with these duties, the unit also participated in search and rescue missions of aircraft and ships in the Coral Sea. The squadron's marine section also carried out a wide range of activities in addition to their tending to the needs of the flying boats. They brought sick seamen ashore from allied ships, ferried personnel and supplies to the many radar stations up and down the coast. A less arduous but regular task was the ferrying of Townsville-based WAAAF on leave to a rest home at Arcadia on nearby Magnetic Island.

#### The Short Empire Effort

With only two aircraft "on the flight line", the burden was often borne by one when the other was out of the water for servicing, as in March 1943, when A18-13 was unserviceable for 11 days. Nevertheless, in February the aircraft flew 365 hours, carried 1,158 passengers and 80,705 lbs (36,000 kg) of freight, while in April the figures were 443 hours, 1,740 passengers and 167,502 lbs (76,000 kg) of freight. During this period, a slipway was constructed by the airmen of the squadron when the Department of the Interior was unable to supply the necessary materials, and an additional three moorings were laid down in anticipation of the arrival of Dornier Do24 flying boats.

There was some excitement on 31 January when the air raid alarm was sounded at 1800 hours, but relief when the all clear was given 15 minutes later. The granting of six months harvest leave to AC Holley in May, so that he could return home to dig a potato crop, emphasises the importance of food production and the shortage of farm labour at the time.

### The Dorniers Arrive

In June, the first three of an eventual five Dornier Do24 flying boats arrived to replace the Short Empires which were soon to be returned to Qantas. The Dorniers were former NEI Naval Air Service aircraft which had escaped just ahead of the Japanese in early 1942. Three of them were sunk in a devastating raid on Broome in March and the remainder had been taken over by the RAAF, overhauled and pressed into service. Their RAAF numbers were A49-1, -2, -3, -4, and -5.

A three-engined flying boat of pre-war design, they had been built to meet the requirements of the Dutch government by the German manufacturer Dornier, and thus spare parts were always going to be a problem when they arrived in Australia. This was confirmed when in July all five aircraft were grounded because of electrical faults which made them unsafe. By now the two short Empires had been returned to Qantas, so for the last two weeks of July there was no flying at all. By September, three were back in service, flying a total of 228 hours, carrying 348 passengers and 73,000 lbs (33,110 kg) of freight.

Throughout 1943, their unserviceability increased and in October the five aircraft were out of action for periods of 22, 25, 20, 15 and 10 days respectively, while in November, the squadron flew only 338 hours, much less than they had achieved with only the two Shorts. How the crews must have longed to have back the faithful, capacious and comfortable old warriors! By December it was obviously impossible to fly the Dorniers for much longer when they were unserviceable for a total of 109 days, flew for only 59 hours and carried no passengers or freight.

### Enter the Martin Mariners

On 22 June 1943, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr John Curtin, announced in the House of Representatives that, in response to urgent requests, the US President Roosevelt had approved the supply to Australia of up to 475 planes, among them 12 Martin Mariner flying boats for use as transport aircraft.

The Martin Mariner PBM-3 was a twin-engined flying boat of distinctive appearance, with long gull-shaped wings and twin rudders at the end of a tailplane with pronounced dihedral. With their 14 cylinder Wright R-2600 radial engines developing 1,700 hp each, they had a top speed of 210 mph (340 kph) and could carry up to 30 passengers or 8,000-9,000 lbs (3,630-4,080 kg) of freight in the transport configuration. Originally designed to be a maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft, those supplied to the RAAF had been used originally in that role over the Atlantic Ocean. The writer remembers seeing plates on them in 1944, stating that they had flown with the "Banana River Detachment" (Florida) of the US Navy. In place of the bombs or depth charges normally carried in the under-wing bomb bays behind the engines, they carried long-range fuel tanks.

In December 1943, four pilots, three navigators and four fitters departed on Mariner conversion courses and on 21 January 1944,

Mariner A70-11 was allotted to the squadron after being ferried from the USA, followed in February by A70-2. Initially it was proposed that 41 Squadron should operate from Rose Bay in Sydney Harbour, but this was not proceeded with. By the end of March, Mariners A70-2, -3, -4, -5, -10, -11 and -12 were on strength and unit strength was 33 officers and 202 airmen. Unfortunately, disaster overtook one of the Dorniers when, on 11 March in Darwin Harbour, A49-5 caught fire and sank, badly burning Flight Sergeant Wall.

Initially, the serviceability of the Mariners was little better than that of the Dorniers, with the eight aircraft unserviceable for a total of 185 days, resulting in a total of only 324 hours being flown, and 1,303 passengers and 60,000 lbs (27,215 kg) of freight being carried in July 1944. It had now been decided that 41 Squadron would move to Cairns, where accommodation, workshop facilities and moorings had been vacated by the last of the Catalina squadrons when it moved to Darwin.

### The Move to Cairns

Thus, on 1 July 1944, the squadron was moved to Cairns with a distinguished former No.10 RAAF Sunderland Squadron identity, Squadron Leader S.R.C. (Sam) Wood DFC in command. On 17 August, Sqn Ldr Wood took off from Trinity Inlet, Cairns, in A70-8 on a survey flight to examine suitable sites in New Guinea for flying boat operations. He and his crew landed at Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Finschhafen, Hollandia, Woendi Island and Madang, returning via Port Moresby to Cairns on 23 August. Meanwhile on 15 August, A70-6 had suffered an in-flight emergency when, ten seconds after take-off from Hamilton Reach on the Brisbane River, fire broke out in one of the engines, due to No.8 cylinder breaking in half. Fortunately, the aircraft was able to alight without further damage.

By the end of August, with nine aircraft available, 41 Squadron flew 526 hours, carried 2,376 passengers and lifted 144,000 lbs (65,320 kg) of freight. September 1944 was a busy month for, in addition to the Scheduled Directorate of Air Transport (DAT) services between Brisbane, Cairns, Port Moresby, Madang and Hollandia, searches were made for a missing USAAF C-47, a B-25, an army launch and a barge, all but the first being successful.

With the CO on leave for the month, Squadron Leader H.G. Pockley DFC assumed temporary command. Following receipt of a letter of appreciation from DAT on the squadron's operations, he addressed ground staff, praising them for their contribution (my letter of 13 September). He visited Headquarters North-Eastern Area (HQNEA) Townsville, to arrange for a launch for the alighting area on Lake Sentani, Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea. On a flight in A70-4 on the 20th to Port Moresby, he arrived three hours overdue because of a faulty drift sight, then had to turn back on the leg to Madang when bad weather closed "The Gap" in the Owen Stanley Ranges. On the 17th he had carried out a test flight with a Mariner loaded to capacity with 75 AIF troops to

establish the Mariner's maximum capacity. The normal maximum passenger load was about 30. He also discussed with the Cairns Harbour Board the provision of a site for a flying boat slipway, following the near sinking at its moorings of A70-6.

The squadron camp area was closed on the 10th due to an alleged riot involving "Allied" servicemen. The month ended with A70-7 making a forced landing near Long Island in the Whitsunday Islands, during which equipment had to be jettisoned. The Unit History Sheets for October point to the existence of a morale problem amongst the airmen. In my letters I wrote of boredom due to lack of amenities and things to do in camp and of long walks to fill in off-duty hours (my letter of 13 October). The Area Physical Training Officer visited the squadron to arrange the provision of sports material and a weekly sports period, which included swimming excursions to Barron Waters and Yorkeys Knob Beach. The Area Education Officer also visited and arranged to be available for weekly interviews with airmen (my letter of 19 October). The CO also discussed personnel problems with the Staff Officer Personnel at HQNEA.

As a result of these efforts, there were more frequent visits by entertainment units, which included a concert by a Navy Party and a recital by a RAAF duo of piano and violin "attended by 100 airmen" (1 November). Later that month, the Area Welfare Officer undertook to obtain valves for an unserviceable, battery-operated wireless set, and a piano for the Recreation Hut.

Hours flown in November were down to 406 with a total aircraft unavailability of 152 days. Flying boat operations involve additional hazards arising from the marine environment. In November, both A70-11 and 12 were holed by marine craft which ferried aircrew and maintenance staff to and from the line of moorings on the southern side of Trinity Inlet, and loaded and unloaded monthly up to 2,500 passengers and 250,000 kg of freight using slow and unwieldy bomb scows. Marine operations were made more difficult by the large tidal variations and consequent strong currents, as well as in the "wet", by a large amount of flood debris. These incidents led to a visit from the Marine Officer, HQNEA, to discuss causes and remedies.

On 27 November, A70-2 experienced the accidental release of a fuel tank from the underwing, engine nacelle bay while taxiing on the Brisbane River. In a later incident on 1 March 1945, Flight Lieutenant Fox in A70-3, again at Hamilton on the Brisbane River, in trying to avoid two Liberty ships, collided with a third ship, damaging the aircraft (my letter of 3 March). On 16 November the popular Sqn Ldr Pockley was notified of his posting to No.7 Operational Training Unit (7 OTU) to undergo a Captains' conversion course on B-24 Liberators. (Chapter 7, letter of 1 February 1944).

1944 ended with two goodwill flights, when A70-5 flew a load of fresh vegetables to RAAF units in the Darwin area and A70-4, captained by Flying Officer P.E. Wright, flew to remote and lonely Willis Island in

the Coral Sea to drop Christmas parcels to the small meteorological party there, whose main function was to give advance warning of the approach of cyclones. Boxing Day was spoilt for the crew of A70-7, who were placed on standby for a possible anti-submarine patrol, evidence that the war had not completely receded from our northern shores at this late stage. It proved to be a false alarm, but a visit by an army officer on 13 January 1945, to discuss the filling in of air raid slit trenches seemed to confirm that all danger had now passed.

The new year began tragically when A69088 LAC Moran R.L.R., a Fitter IIE (Engine Fitter) was electrocuted while operating a valve-grinding machine at the Squadron workshops at No.8 Wharf on 25 January. He was given a RAAF funeral the next day, which was attended by 100 officers and airmen. Salamua, New Guinea and Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, were added to the schedule and for the first time the total weight of passengers and freight carried topped the one million pounds mark (490,255 kg) when 521 hours were flown and 3,406 passengers were carried in January.

"The Wet" arrived in earnest in February, with flying cancelled on the 1st due to cyclonic conditions. An increasing backlog of maintenance led to the curtailment of flying until it could be reduced, which it was estimated would take three weeks. Squadron personnel were called on again in March to participate in funeral parties for the victims of the crash of a Lockheed Hudson into the sea just off Cairns in very bad weather, which claimed the lives of the crew and AIF General George Vasey, Major General Downes and Lt Col Bertram on 5 March.

A cyclone warning was issued on 15 March but did not eventuate; however, the weather was so bad by the 18th that flying was cancelled. From 20-24 March, several Mariners were involved in the search for survivors from the freighter *Sibigo*, which foundered in the Coral Sea. A70-1 found a life raft with some survivors but it was too rough to land and a nearby ship was asked to assist. In a report published in the *Cairns Post*, the master of this ship reported a barometer reading of 28.87 inches, winds of 130-160 km per hour and "boiling seas" (my letter of 8 March).

### Disbandment

Due to the prolonged severity of "The Wet" and aircraft unserviceability, only 231 hours were flown in April, but it was a pointer of things to come. On 4 May, HQNEA instructed that the squadron was to be disbanded from 10 May and all Mariners were to be placed in storage at No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot at Lake Boga, Vic. As if to mock this decision, next day A70-12 located a ship in distress and guided rescue vessels to it. Now a Wg Cdr, Sam Woods DFC was posted to command No.74 Wing Headquarters and Sqn Ldr G.M. Mason was appointed to temporarily command 41 Sqn. A day later (VE Day, 8 May), HQNEA advised the squadron that the decision to disband was deferred until 10 June.

Maintenance of morale under these circumstances was proving a problem. The Director of Education, Gp Capt Sheath, visited the Squadron on 8 May and as a result, post-war rehabilitation groups were organised. Weekly open air picture shows began and Unit teams participated in local sports competitions. An Army Entertainment Unit presented a concert and on 3 June the RAAF Mobile Concert Party, the "Squadronaires", put on a memorable show.

Meanwhile, the squadron was instructed to carry on until further notice. A daily service to Madang and a bi-weekly service to Brisbane were maintained. Some members were posted to form No.114 Air Sea Rescue Flight, while others, like the author, were posted south to begin discharge procedures. On 3 June 1945, the Unit History Sheet recorded that:

This will be the last Form A50 submitted by 41 Squadron which is now disbanded.

In a rather belated tribute, *PIX Weekly* magazine of 16 June 1945, printed a three page pictorial feature on 41 Squadron and its Martin Mariners, headed:

#### RAAF LIFELINE TO BATTLE FRONT

Playing a magnificent background role to frontline fighting in the Pacific is a RAAF fleet of twin-engined flying-boats, Martin Mariners, which transport high priority personnel and equipment to and from Australia. With a top speed of 225 mph and load capacity of 35 personnel and two tons of freight, Mariners form an invaluable, fast line of supply to forces in forward areas. In the photograph from Department of Air, a Mariner with its all-Australian crew is followed from a northern Australia base to Hollandia.

The crew above comprises, Captain: Flg Off N.F. McNight, Yarrowonga, Vic; 2nd Pilot: Flt Sgt Noakes, Qld; Navigator: W Off A.R. Hudson, Belmore, NSW; Flight Engineer: Flt Sgt W.G. Aubin, Casino, NSW; Fitter: Cpl G.W. Duffy, Qld.

[Unit History Sheets No.41 Squadron, Historical Section, Air Force Office, Department of Defence, Russell Street Offices, Canberra ACT.  
Jane's Encyclopedia of Aviation, London, 1950.  
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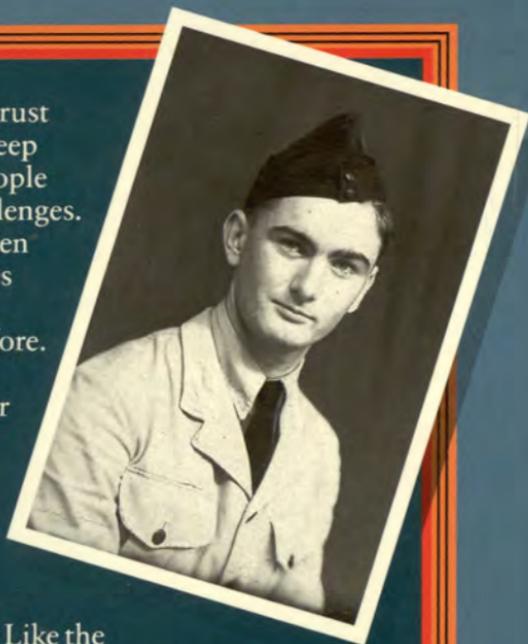
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**W**ORLD WAR II thrust Australia into a deep crisis, presenting her people with extraordinary challenges. Men, women and children found themselves in roles they could hardly have imagined a few years before. Thousands went to war while thousands of other servicemen and women held their positions in posts throughout Australia, never reaching the battle lines. They called themselves the “koalas”. Like the furry Australian animal, they were “not to be shot at or exported”.



One of these “koalas”, Leading Aircraftman Les Sullivan, through his personal letters home and diary entries of this time, tells their fascinating story.

Les Sullivan enlisted in the RAAF in 1942 at the age of 18, and served as a flight rigger and airframe fitter at various training and operational units in Australia until the end of the war.

After receiving his BA from the University of Sydney in 1950, Les returned to the RAAF as an Education Officer where his appointments included two years on exchange duty at the RAF School of Education and four years at Headquarters Support Command as Staff Officer Ground Training. From 1974–1986 he was an Educational Counsellor at RMIT.

He now lives at Pambula Beach, NSW, where his interests include writing and community affairs.