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SABRETACHE

The Journal and Proceedings of the Military Historical Society of Australia (founded 1957)

JUNE 2021

The aims of the Society are the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects, and the preservation of historical military objects with particular reference to the armed forces of Australia.

Constitution and Rules

The Constitution and Rules of the Society are printed in the January-March 1993 and April-June 1997 issues of *Sabretache* respectively. Section 12 of the Constitution was amended in the June 2010 issue of *Sabretache*.

Sabretache

The Federal Council is responsible for the publication of the Society Journal, *Sabretache*, which is mailed to each member of the Society quarterly.

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The annual membership subscription, due on 1 July each year, is \$40 plus branch subscription. Details of subscriptions and meetings are available from branch secretaries. Non-branch members should contact the Membership Officer.

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Editorial

The recent announcements of increased weapons procurement for the Australian Defence Force in line with other nations is reminiscent to the rapid escalation in the lead up to war in 1939. In this case, though, there has been no real period of military disarmament following a major conflict such as happened in 1918 and 1945. Clearly the foe is China, and the time of appeasement has passed. Graeme Dobell, writing for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in April, noted a new 'icy age' in Sino-Australian relations. Australian criticism of China has resulted in trade disruption and accusations of being a 'puppet' of the US. Chinese treatment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang and democracy protestors in Hong Kong has attracted the approbation of the international community. In response China has gone on the offensive, bullying where it can. Australia has become the target of Chinese sanction, being blamed for an anti-China 'crusade' of 'racist attacks against Chinese and Asian people'. In response, Australia has recently signed a defence agreement with Japan and joined the reinstated Quad alliance. Circumstances differ from those of the mid-1930s and rather than appeasement the policy of the US and its allies is one of containment. How long this lasts will be what keeps policy planners awake at night.

Justin Chadwick

JUNE 2021

VOLUME LXII — NUMBER 2

ISSN 0048 8933

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Service with 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion, recalled by Lance Sergeant Don Collins

Gregory J. Ivey¹

2nd NGIB in training, 1944-1945

In March 1941, aged 18, Matthew Don Collins enlisted as air crew in the Royal Australian Air Force, along with his former school mates, but he was rejected because his vision in one eye was not 20/20. Don, instead, decided to commence a Commerce degree at the University of Melbourne. Later, on 7 December 1941, Don caught a train from Melbourne to Bonegilla for a three-week, compulsory military training camp and there he joined the Army. Mid-1942 saw Don posted to Darwin with the 2nd/11th Army Field Regiment. After 18 months on the receiving end of most Japanese air raids and daily temperatures over 30° Celsius, this regiment, including Don, sailed to Lae, New Guinea.

The 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion (NGIB) was officially raised on 11 September 1944 and Australian officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were recruited mainly from Australian units already in New Guinea. Don and two of his mates answered the call for volunteers to join 2nd NGIB. Don and several others were selected for their capability as soldiers and their probable compatibility with New Guinea soldiers.² They were posted to 2nd NGIB as lance sergeants.

Don was moved to Camp Diddy near Nadzab for his role in training 2nd NGIB soldiers from late 1944 to early 1945. A major problem for the Australians initially was communicating with the soldiers. Don learnt Pidgin by living in close quarters with the soldiers and listening to their conversations. As had occurred in 1st NGIB, a number of New Guinean soldiers were transferred from the Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB) and these formed a considerable portion of 2nd NGIB. It was observed at that time, and later, that these experienced PIB soldiers were very unhappy with their transfer from the PIB. Don was able to verify a serious dispute which arose from unreasonable conditions imposed on both experienced and new soldiers of 2nd NGIB during this training period.³

1 Greg Ivey writes book reviews, letters and occasional articles about the Second World War in Papua New Guinea, particularly the campaigns in Papua. He served in the Australian Army in PNG and visited the well-known mainland and island battle sites. Now retired in Queensland after careers in education and training, he is the vice president and copy editor for the PIB-NGIB-HQ-PIR Association.

2 G. M. Byrnes, *Green Shadows: A War History of the Papuan Infantry Battalion*, Self-published: Newmarket (1989) p. 147.

3 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 148.



Image 1: 3 Pl A Coy 2nd NGIB after capturing the Kiarivu airstrip, August 1945. Post-War, KABOIBUS-KIARIVU was one of eleven Battle Honours awarded to the Pacific Islands Regiment. Courtesy of M.B. Pears.

This cultural dispute arose, coinciding with Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) administrative control, when 2nd NGIB soldiers were instructed that rank insignia was to be worn on their rami (an item of uniform commonly known as a lap-lap), similar to the custom for indentured labourers before the war.⁴ Experienced soldiers from the PIB had worn rank chevrons on their uniform shirt sleeves and they considered this instruction to be insulting to their war-time status. Don witnessed a heated exchange between 2nd NGIB Acting Commanding Officer, Major John H. Pawson, and an NCO in an office at Nadzab. In this exchange, Pawson told the (former PIB) Corporal Diti that he was to wear his stripes on his lap-lap. The experienced NCO was furious, but Pawson insisted that the NCO should wear his stripes on his lap-lap or else 'he would not have any stripes at all'.

Early the next morning, when the duty officer visited the other ranks (ORs) mess he was set upon and his thumb was cut off with a machete. A mob of soldiers then headed towards the officers' and sergeants' location. Lieutenant L. A. Hodge and another officer approached the soldiers on a small bridge which crossed a fast-flowing stream. As the soldiers' leader, with a machete, reached the officers, Hodge swung a hefty right blow to the leader's chin, knocking him into the stream below. The impetus of the mob was stopped, and the confrontation ended. Four ring leaders were identified and beaten up by officers, out of sight, behind the officers'

⁴ The rami was an Army-issue long piece of cloth to cover the body from the waist to the knees.

mess. They were then court martialled and sentenced to prison terms, but were released early and transferred to the PIR Training Depot.⁵ Hodge left the battalion saying that he had lost trust in those soldiers.

It is relevant here to mention another conversation, during this training period, between Don and company commander John Pawson. One day, Pawson observed Don carrying a car battery — Don had been to the transport lines to get a car battery to power his personal radio. Pawson asked Don, ‘What are you doing?’. Don explained his need for a car battery. Pawson then rebuked Don saying, ‘In this battalion, we (Europeans) don’t carry batteries. You take the battery back and get a native (soldier) to carry it’. By contrast, Don stated that there was no racial discrimination during his time in ‘C’ Company which was led by Eddie Reeve, a ‘madly brave and good company Commander’.⁶

Overall, Don observed that the Australians ‘had much to learn’ about the culture of the indigenous soldiers during the training period. He recalled that, when roused, the soldiers tended to go berserk, logic went out the window and violence could be on the cards. Don gave an example of an incident only one month after the lap-lap controversy. Don and his platoon commander, Lieutenant Keith R. Kear, faced an ugly situation when their soldiers turned against them and had them pinned up against a wall. Fortunately, after much talking, the two Australians quietened the soldiers down.

Corporal Diti featured in another well-known incident just as the battalion was leaving Camp Diddy for active service in the Sepik District. As battalion stores were being moved from the camp to Lae, torrential rain fell and a three-ton truck was caught and stranded in the middle of the flooded Erap River. Two officers and a sergeant were saved by the efforts of Corporal Diti while another sergeant was swept downstream and drowned. Diti was awarded the George Medal for valour for his rescue operation.⁷

Near Camp Diddy was an American army base (American Combat Replacement and Training Centre) where Don found facilities not available at his camp. Don was able to trade his Army ration of beer for cigarettes from American servicemen. Usually, Don could trade his weekly beer ration of two bottles for one carton of ‘Lucky Strikes’.

5 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 148.

6 Notes from interviews conducted by author at Peregian Beach, Queensland, on 15 and 18 July 2019.

7 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 149; ‘How Corporal Diti Won the George Medal’, (Melbourne) *Argus*, 10 July 1946, p. 4.

2nd NGIB in action against the enemy, 1945

In June 1945, 2nd NGIB moved progressively from Camp Diddy at Nadzab to the Maprik area of the Sepik District where it came under the command of 17th Australian Infantry Brigade. By 28 June, 'C' Company, including Don, was based at Hayfield Airstrip and led by company commander Captain E.R. Reeve, MC.⁹ Around 12 July, Reeve called his platoon leaders together at night to plan an attack on a considerable Japanese contingent in the nearby, elevated village called Dunbit. By lantern light it was decided that 9 Platoon would take the lead while 10 Platoon, with Don, would position itself to catch any Japanese soldiers withdrawing from Dunbit. At first light, Don and his platoon commander, Lieutenant D. F. Hadfield, blackened their faces (to look like local soldiers) and then 10 Platoon set off. This platoon stayed in position for hours, hearing the exchange of fire between 9 Platoon and the Japanese, but no enemy withdrew toward their position. Later that day, Don learnt that 9 Platoon Commander, Lieutenant E. W. Harris had been killed while one soldier was missing believed killed, and two soldiers were wounded.¹⁰

The next morning, 13 July, 10 Platoon with Don attempted another attack on Dunbit. They climbed the steep slope to the village to find that the Japanese



Image 2: Lord Wakehurst, Governor of New South Wales, with Captain Al Gay, Officer Commanding B Company, 2nd NGIB, and Lieutenant Colonel DH Dwyer, inspecting B Company at Camp Diddy. Image: AWM 090512.

8 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 148.

9 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 164.

10 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 167.

had left during the night. Left behind was one sick Japanese soldier sitting against a tree and eating from a pot of what appeared to be 'cooked meat'. The body of their missing soldier was searched for by 10 Platoon but without success. Was this a case of cannibalism?¹¹ The platoon leaders considered the fate of the sick Japanese soldier. They felt it would be cruel to leave him to a fate with wild pigs, so they shot him.

Next month, on 12 August 1945, Don and several soldiers raced for their weapons in panic when they saw a large group of Japanese soldiers heading for them. When the 2nd NGIB soldiers looked more closely, they saw that the Japanese were carrying a white flag.¹² That was extraordinary because they were aware that surrender was against the code of Japanese soldiers. Don and other soldiers sat the Japanese down in three rows and offered each one a tin of bully beef and several biscuits. At the same time, company commander Eddie Reeve talked to the Japanese captain through an interpreter attached to the company. Don was amazed at the discipline shown by those starving soldiers – they did not touch the food until the interview of their captain was over, and the captain gave them the signal to eat. Only then did the soldiers 'wolf down' the food. As Don watched, the Japanese captain opened one tin of bully beef, took a few mouthfuls, and then passed the tin to his soldiers to consume. That incident alarmed Don – how would the NGIB ever defeat such disciplined soldiers?

Don saw the psychological effects of the war in New Guinea on one Australian soldier – named Sergeant X. An officer had noticed that each time Sergeant X took his platoon on patrol, he never had a report of any contact with the enemy. When questioned by the officer, Sergeant X said words to the effect that, 'I take my Platoon out of distance from the camp, wait for several hours and then come back'. When asked why he did that, Sergeant X replied, 'You can get killed out there and that's not going to happen to me'. So, Sergeant X was withdrawn, court-martialled, and demoted to private. When Don sailed back to Australia for discharge after the war ended, he was in a staging camp and saw Private X there. In a brief conversation, Private X said to Don, 'Listen, I had a wife and daughter and I love them both. I felt a greater obligation to care for them than to try to kill bloody Japs...at least I survived'.¹³

In his recent interview by staff of the Australian War Memorial, Don summarised his experience with the soldiers of 2nd NGIB he had led. 'When it came to being in action', he said, 'I can only give them credit. Although sometimes they would keep firing and risk running out of ammunition'. Don saluted the indigenous soldiers, believing that they were 'widely regarded as marvellous at patrolling and detecting the Japanese'.¹⁴

11 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 167.

12 Byrnes, *Green Shadows*, p. 172.

13 Notes from interviews conducted by author at Peregian Beach, Queensland, on 15 and 18 July 2019.

14 Interview by Claire Hunter, AWM staff, published 29 June 2020.

An Australian Pathfinder over Germany

Tim Willasey-Wilsey¹

I first met Hal Mettam in Beirut in 1974 just before the civil war which tore that country apart. He was flying Boeing 707s for Middle East Airlines (MEA). Those were the days when being an airline pilot was still glamorous. Hal flew just three or four flights a week sometimes to London or Paris but more often to Cairo, Amman and Jeddah. Most evenings he was free to dine with his family in the restaurants down town. Beirut was known as the Paris of the East and the balmy evenings sitting looking over the Mediterranean were as close to paradise as you could get.

I was aware that Hal had flown Lancasters during the war but he never wanted to talk about it. In fact the only time we discussed the war was when the manager of the Phoenicia Hotel came and sat at our table one evening. He was Austrian and told us how he had swum the river at Stalingrad and was one of the only survivors from his unit in that worst of all battles. A year later he died in the ruins of his own hotel as the civil war engulfed Lebanon.

Hal and his wife Elizabeth retired to England and I kept in touch with them until they both died in recent years. As time went by he attended more squadron reunions and would let slip the occasional wartime anecdote. However, it was not until his two daughters allowed me to look at his logbooks that I was able to paint the full picture of his career in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) assisted by a variety of sources including the Squadron Operational Record books which are available in the British National Archives.

Hal was an Australian from Perth where he was born on 2 August 1924. His daughters later wrote that he was sent to boarding school at the age of six, and spent his holidays on his uncle's enormous cattle station, Margaret Downs, in the Northern Territory. He remembered being flown there by one of the legendary pioneers of Australian aviation, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, one of the first men to fly solo from England to Australia, and being allowed to sit on the wing, watching the Australian outback unfold beneath him.²

After a short spell in the RAAF Reserve he began his flying training in January 1943 in Tiger Moths and then Wirraways. The latter was an Australian-built trainer modelled on the American NA-16. After seven months of training Hal boarded the USS Mount Vernon, an American troopship which spent much of the war plying the waters between Australia and San Francisco. During his five weeks in the United States Hal was based at Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts which was used as a staging camp prior to embarkation at Boston.

1 Tim Willasey-Wilsey is Visiting Professor of War Studies at King's College London.

2 Lecia Mettam in her father's funeral oration, July 2011.



Image 1: Hal just before his 20th birthday from his RAAF identity card.
Source: Mettam family.

Owing to an outbreak of Scarlet Fever in the camp he was able to explore some of the United States by Greyhound bus. There followed a seven day dash across the Atlantic in the Cunard Line's RMS Aquitania painted in wartime grey to evade German U-boats.

In England flight training ramped up considerably. After an initial few weeks in Brighton, Hal was sent to RAF Snitterfield in Warwickshire, the home of No 19 Pilots' Advanced Flying Unit where he trained on the Airspeed Oxford. In March 1944 he moved to RAF Fiskerton in Lincolnshire, where he flew Oxfords and Wellingtons at No 1514 Beam Approach Training (BAT) Flight before a four month spell at 27 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Lichfield particularly intended for Commonwealth pilots and crews about to join front-line RAF squadrons. Finally in August 1944 Hal got to fly the Halifax bomber of 1656 Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU) at RAF Lindholme, Yorkshire before moving to No 2 Lancaster Finishing School (LFS) at RAF Hemswell in Lincolnshire. On 16 September 1944 Hal qualified to fly Lancasters on operations.³

It was at Lichfield that Hal's Australian crew formed as a unit. Flight Sergeant 'Snow' Barton was the navigator, Keith Saladine (bomb aimer), Bill Evans (wireless operator), Ned Kennedy (rear gunner) and Cliff Lockyer (mid-upper gunner). Frank Simon, the only British member of the crew, joined them at 1656 HCU and took his first flight with Hal on 16 August 1944. In mid-August Hal was promoted from Flight Sergeant to Pilot Officer and in November to Flying Officer. In Spring 1945 he became a Flight Lieutenant.

The meticulous courses of training were a far cry from how pilots were rushed into combat during the First World War. In fact his training (and a large slice of luck) may well account for Hal's survival during the following year and that of all of his crew, which remained almost unchanged throughout the war. On 21

³ All details and dates of Hal Mettam's training and operations are from his log books held by the family.

September 1944 Hal joined 166 Squadron at RAF Kirmington. The squadron had been busy for several days bombing Calais which was still holding out following the Normandy invasion. It had lost three aircraft and crews during the month of September.

For his first operational mission Hal flew as second pilot with a British crew. This was a daylight mission on 3 October to Westkapelle in Holland. The Bomber Command Campaign Diary explains that

Over 250 Lancasters and seven Mosquitos commenced the attack on the sea walls of Walcheren Island. Coastal gun batteries at Walcheren dominated the approaches to the port of Antwerp, whose facilities could handle 40,000 tons per day of much needed supplies when ships could safely use the approaches. The intention was to flood the island, most of which was...below sea level.⁴

On departure from the target Hal could see flooding over an extensive area.⁵

Just a few days later Hal's crew was moved to RAF Scampton as 153 Squadron was reformed. By late 1944 bomber squadrons had two flights of around 18 aircraft each commanded by a Squadron Leader. The overall squadron was led by a Wing Commander. Hal's B flight commander, Squadron Leader John Gee, later wrote in his memoir *Wingspan* that they were at Kirmington 'only long enough to gather together a few crews and aeroplanes and fly them over to our new base at RAF Scampton just north of Lincoln on the Roman road known as Ermine Street. So on 15 October 1944 153 Squadron was reborn. ...Very quickly new Lancasters were flown in from Avro factories to Scampton and new aircrew arrived from the Lancaster finishing school'.⁶

Scampton was an established RAF station and a great deal more comfortable than the temporary airfields which had sprung up all over Lincolnshire. At least Hal would return from missions to a warm bedroom and clean sheets.

On 25 October Hal's crew (making their first operational sortie together) accompanied the squadron on a daylight raid on Essen. They dropped their 11 1000-pound and four 500-pound bombs from 19,000 feet at 1532 hours. Gee later wrote

4 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 3 October 1944, UK National Archives Online (NAO). <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20070706011932/http://www.raf.mod.uk/bombercommand/diary.html>. Accessed January 2021.

5 166 Squadron Operations Record Book, UK National Archives (NA) AIR 27/1089/45.

6 J.W. Gee, *Wingspan: Recollections of a Bomber Pilot*, Self-published: Wellesbourne (1988), pp. 115-116.

We went on towards Essen climbing to our bombing height of 20,000ft. As we passed the 10,000ft mark we turned on our oxygen supply. Soon we saw the searchlights and flak ahead. What a barrage they put up to defend the Ruhr. Essen was hidden beneath total cloud cover but the Pathfinders had done their job well; we could clearly see a concentration of red and green flares above the cloud. We released our bombs after aiming at the sky markers with the flak bursting all around us.⁷



Image 2: Sergeant Mettam with Course No 48 at RAF Snitterfield.
Source: Mettam family.

⁷ Gee, *Wingspan*, pp. 122-123.

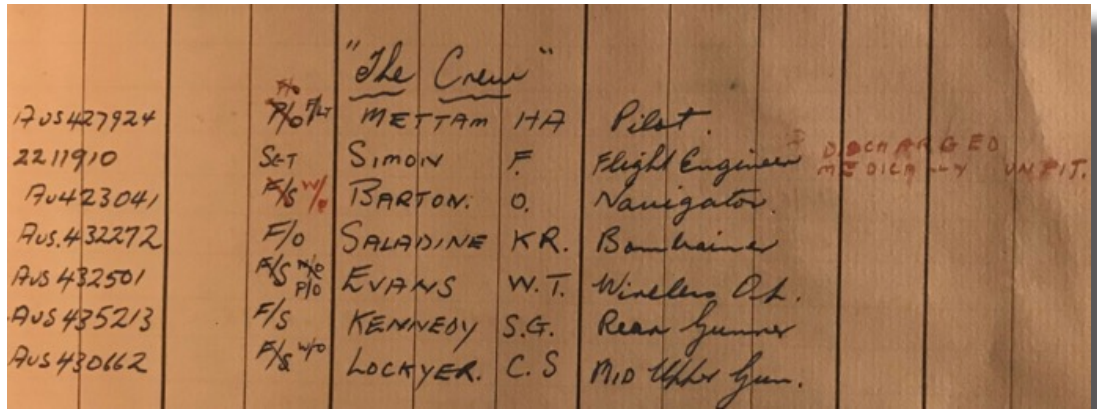


Image 3: Hal's logbook entry naming his crew. Source: Mettam family.

The bombers were fortunate on this occasion to have fighter support in the form of Mustangs and Spitfires. This had been a massive raid by 771 bombers including 508 Lancasters. Essen's Krupp steel works were destroyed as was the Borbeck pig iron plant. That night Essen 'lost its role as one of Germany's most important centres of war production'.⁸

There followed three massive raids on Cologne. In the first on 28 October 733 aircraft took part. According to the Bomber Command campaign diary, the 'districts of Mülheim and Zollstock, north-east and south-west of the centre respectively, became the centre of the raids and were both devastated. Much damage was caused to power-stations, railways and harbour installations on the Rhine'.⁹ Hal's crew, flying Lancaster NG757, took part in the daylight raid. This time they had a 4,000-pound bomb, five 1000-pounders and six 500-pound bombs. After two dummy runs at 1606 hours they dropped their bombs from 20,000 feet over some red target indicators and factory fires. The 'aiming point could not be seen owing to cloud. No markers were seen and the Master Bomber could not be heard. Alternative built-up area east of the Rhine was bombed on second run up. Huge flash lit up the cloud and considerable fires seen burning'.¹⁰ They were twice hit by anti-aircraft 'flak' fire and sustained two holes in the aircraft.

Geer recalled 'It was to be a daylight attack in which sixteen Lancasters of 153 Squadron were to take part... As we approached Cologne we could see the ground clearly through the broken cloud and huge cloud of smoke rising from the target area. The first wave had done its job well. As we approached ... all hell broke loose. We could hear the shells exploding and could smell them as we flew through the balls of black smoke. The aircraft was being bounced about the sky

8 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 25 October 1944, NAO.

9 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 28 October 1944, NAO.

10 153 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/20.

by the explosions. After dropping our bombs we emerged from the barrage and set course for home... We enjoyed a few drinks in the Mess that night before going to bed'.¹¹

'The squadron had settled down well and on our first few operations we had not suffered any losses although a number of aeroplanes had been damaged by flak. Morale was very high and I was fortunate to have a great bunch of chaps in my flight'.

On 30 October there was a night raid on Cologne. They took off at 1740 and dropped their bombs at 2104 from 18,000 feet before touching down back at Scampton safely at 2325 hours. Pathfinders had illuminated the target with red and white flares and the crew reported a 'good concentration of bomb bursts'. The very following day they returned to Cologne on another night mission. Releasing the bombs from 19,000 feet they reported seeing a 'large orange glow seen reflected on cloud'.¹³ On 31 October 'one of the squadron Lancasters was hit by a 1000lb bomb dropped from an aircraft flying above. The bomb went straight through the starboard wing which was badly damaged but fortunately it was able to return to Scampton'.¹⁴

Three raids in four days must have been a gruelling experience but the crew only had one day off before Hal's sixth mission, to Dusseldorf on 2 November. This was their third successive trip in Lancaster PD642 and it was another night-time mission. They released their bombs from 20,000 feet and reported that the fire glow could be seen from 70 miles away.¹⁵

Gee observed that it 'was a black day for the squadron. We suffered our first loss when a Lancaster flown by Flying Officer McCormack failed to return'.¹⁶ He continued:

A tour of operations on a heavy bomber squadron placed a very considerable strain on the nerves of the crews involved. Only those who actually experience it themselves really know and fully understand the strain to which the aircrew were subjected... Occasionally someone's nerves would break under the strain and the individual concerned would be quite incapable of going on any more operations.¹⁷

After what must have been a blissful week of rest Hal next flew to Germany on 9 November to bomb the synthetic oil plant at Wanne Eickel in the Ruhr in

11 Gee, *Wingspan*, pp. 125-127.

12 Gee, *Wingspan*, p. 128.

13 153 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/20.

14 Gee, *Wingspan*, p. 129.

15 153 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/22.

16 Gee, *Wingspan*, p. 129.

17 Gee, *Wingspan*, pp.143-144.

daylight. Two days later, during an attack on Dortmund, Hal's Lancaster was attacked by a twin-engined enemy aircraft (possibly a Messerschmitt 410). Two days later, at night, the squadron returned to Wanne Eickel. Again the glow of the fires could be seen from 60 miles away. On their return they were diverted (probably because of fog) to the USAF base at Rattlesden, near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk where four squadrons of Flying Fortresses were based. This was not their first brush with the Americans. There was plenty of friendly rivalry. Gee boasted 'The Americans could not believe the load that each Lancaster could carry. On our operations in Lancasters we normally carried a load varying between 12,000-16,000lbs whereas the Flying Fortress would only carry 4000lbs'.¹⁸

The following morning Hal flew NG167 back to Scampton in time for his next (11th) operation the following day: the bombing of Aschaffenburg. It was a night raid and he was ordered by the 'Master Bomber' (from the Pathfinder squadron which had the responsibility for bombing accuracy) to drop his bombs 'at the centre of red glow'. The account continues 'No results observed'. Although the official records are very formulaic one senses a slight feeling of dissatisfaction about this operation, perhaps because the town (not far from Frankfurt) contained a tank factory, a ball-bearing plant and several railway lines.

Six days later the target was Freiburg at night. Hal reported 'buildings burning well in the centre of town and a large explosion at 2000', just five minutes before dropping his bombs from 15,000 feet. The Bomber Command campaign diary comments that:

Freiburg was not an industrial town and had not been bombed before by the RAF. It was attacked on this night because it was a minor railway centre and because many German troops were believed to be present in the town;.... Photographs showed that the railway targets were not hit but that the main town area was severely damaged.²¹

Their next sortie is shown in Hal's log as Merseburg but in the squadron records as Leuna. In fact, Leuna is a small town south of Merseburg with a huge IG Farben factory which created synthetic oil, employing thousands of slave labourers.

On 12 December 1944 Hal flew his 14th mission; to Essen again. During the attack two Lancasters from another squadron collided and blew up with a 'blinding flash'. And on their return journey 'one of our aeroplanes was attacked by a German night-fighter'.²²

Hal was not required to fly to Ludwigshafen on the 15 December, but he did

18 Gee, *Wingspan*, pp. 136-137.

19 153 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/22.

20 153 Squadron Operations Record Book. NA AIR 27/1029/22.

21 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 27-28 November 1944, NAO.

22 Gee, *Wingspan*, p. 139.

take part on the raid on Ulm on the 17th and on Coblenz on the 22nd. On return from Coblenz the fog thickened and, according to Gee, 'we began to wonder where we would be able to land. We knew there would be very few aerodromes in the UK still operational. After some time we received a WT message instructing us to go to Manston in Kent. At Manston a huge emergency landing strip had been built, 3000 yards long and 250 yards wide. A system of fog dispersal known as FIDO burned large quantities of fuel to clear fog up to 200ft thick. There were about

200 Lancasters landing and there were aeroplanes everywhere'.²³ Squadron Leader Gee spotted an opportunity for a night out.



Image 4: Hal (far right) with his crew from left. Keith Saladine, Ned Kennedy, Bill Evans and Snow Barton
Source: Author.

I had a talk with 153 Squadron crews and suggested we go into Margate to fend for ourselves and be back at Manston next morning. We spotted a nice looking inn called the Cinque Ports. We were glad to get into the warmth and enjoy a pint. Mine host... found us something to eat, producing the remains of his daughter's wedding breakfast and a supper of duck, green peas and potatoes. We really enjoyed it. What a way to finish an operation. Later they found us beds for the night. I shared a double bed with my rear gunner.²⁴

The following afternoon hundreds of Lancasters took off from Manston to return to their bases, often taking off three or four abreast. Due to fog, 153 Squadron bombers could not get into Scampton and so landed at nearly Binbrook instead.

On the 27 December Hal's crew had their first failure. In a night attack on Rheydt the bombs 'hung up' in the bomb bay and would not drop. They tried a second bombing run but that too was unsuccessful. Another crew had the identical problem suggesting that something had gone awry when loading the bombs at

²³ Gee, *Wingspan*, pp.146-147.

²⁴ Gee, *Wingspan*, pp.147-148.

ND. 757	P/O. Mettam, H.A. (A.427924-RAAF) Sgt. Simon, F.W. COLOGNE P/O. Saladine, K.R. (A.432272-RAAF) P/Sgt. Barton, O. (A.423041-RAAF) P/Sgt. Evans, W.T. (A.432501-RAAF) P/Sgt. Lockyer, C.S. (A.430662-RAAF) P/Sgt. Kennedy, S.G. (A.495213-RAAF)	13.25	18.25	Bomb load: 1 x 4,000lb. H.C. 5 x 1,000lb. AWM 6 x 500lb. M.C. Bombed at 16.06 hours from 20,000ft. on red T/Is and fires burning in some factories. Aiming point could not be seen owing to cloud. No markers were seen and the Master Bomber was not heard. Alternative built-up area east of the Rhine was bombed on second run up. Huge flash lit up the cloud and considerable fires were seen burning.
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Image 5: Extract from 153 Squadron records for 28 October 1944. Source: NAO.

Scampton. Hal makes no mention of this dangerous incident in his logbook. Jill Saunders, the daughter of Frank Simon, Hal's flight engineer, has a story from her father that Hal landed with a full bomb load. One of the crew asked if they would have to bail out, to which Hal replied calmly 'No, that won't be necessary' before executing a perfect landing.²⁵

Hal's final mission with 153 Squadron was on 2 January 1945 to Nuremburg. The Lancasters took off in early afternoon and would have flown over Lincoln as usual. Gee remembered that he 'liked Lincoln. The beautiful cathedral perched high on the hill at the north end of the city was a wonderful landmark for us on daylight operations as it stood out so well against the skyline'.²⁶ From there they joined the bomber stream towards Germany. At 1926 hours Hal dropped his bombs 'north of the marshalling yards'. He saw a big explosion at 1941 hours before returning to Scampton just before midnight. Tragically 153 Squadron lost another crew when Pilot Officer Reid's aircraft collided near Scampton with another Lancaster belonging to 150 Squadron. Reid and most of his crew were Canadian.²⁷

It was a sad moment for Hal to leave the squadron but he had been selected for Pathfinder training. This was a clear indication that he was highly regarded as a pilot and that his navigator was also first class. The Pathfinder navigation course was short, taking just over a week at RAF Warboys in Huntingdonshire, and a few days later Hal joined 582 Pathfinder Squadron at Little Staughton.

By now there had been a small change to his trusty crew. The one Briton, Frank Simon, was suffering from stomach ulcers which required an operation in Ely and was medically discharged, much to his regret. His daughter comments that her father 'always admired Hal and his skill as a pilot and spoke frequently and fondly of them all'.²⁸ Frank was replaced as flight engineer by another Briton, Sergeant L.H. James. In Pathfinder squadrons the bomb aimer had recently become an additional navigator, so the existing bomb aimer, Keith Saladine, became Navigator II alongside 'Snow' Barton as Navigator I.

²⁵ Email from Jill Saunders to author, 6 February 2021.

²⁶ Gee, *Wingspan*, p.132.

²⁷ Gee, *Wingspan*, p.132.

²⁸ 153 Squadron Operations Record Book. NA AIR 27/1029/26.

Hal's new Squadron had experienced a torrid time since its formation. Between April and July 1944 it had lost 11 of its 36 crews.²⁹ However, it had gained a reputation for navigational excellence. Unfortunately, Hal's first operation to Bottrop in The Ruhr was a failure. His Lancaster could not get above 8,000 feet and he had to abort and land at Manston. The following day Hal flew the ailing aircraft back to Little Staughton on only three engines.

His next destination was Dortmund on 20 February. This went much better and they dropped their bombs and their markers accurately. One scare, however, was an unexploded incendiary in the starboard fuel tank (probably dropped from a Lancaster flying above them).

Three days later Pforzheim was the target. At first sight this seems an unusual target — the traditional home of watch-making in Germany. However, it was believed that the town's skills were being employed to manufacture precision instruments used in the warheads for the V2 rockets which were being used against Britain with devastating effect. Eight aircraft of the squadron took part and for once, there was no cloud over the target and the bombing was deadly accurate. Hal dropped his bombs at 2000 hours, slightly north of the target, and turned for home reaching Little Staughton at 2252 hours, the first plane to arrive back at base.³⁰ Tragically, one of the squadron aircraft was lost including its heroic pilot. The Bomber Command campaign diary records that

Bomber Command's last Victoria Cross of the war was won on this night. The Master Bomber was Captain Edwin Swales, DFC, a South African serving with No 582 Squadron. His Lancaster was twice attacked over the target by a German fighter... Two engines and the rear turret of the Lancaster were put out of action. Captain Swales continued to control the bombing until the end of the raid and must take some credit for the accuracy of the attack. He set out on the return flight but encountered turbulent cloud and ordered his crew to bale out. This they all did successfully but Captain Swales had no opportunity to leave the aircraft and was killed when it crashed.³¹

The death of Swales would have affected Hal deeply. He was a popular member of the squadron and Hal would have known him well, not least because two of his crew (who both survived) were Australian. As for Pforzheim, 83% of its buildings were destroyed that night.

On 1 March 1945 the target was Mannheim. This was the first time that Hal's aircraft had led a raid which meant he was the first to arrive over the target.

29 Gee, *Wingspan*, pp.146-147.

30 Sean Feast, *Master Bombers. The Experiences of a Pathfinder Squadron at War, 1944-45*. Grub Street: London (2008), p.29.

31 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 23-24 February 1945, NAO.

The following night Hal was back in action on another daylight raid to Cologne. He had only landed after the Mannheim raid at 1754 hours the previous evening and took off for Cologne at 0750 hours the following morning. This must have been a nerve-shredding experience with little chance of getting a good night's sleep. He had a good view of Cologne on his first pass but it was obscured when he dropped his bombs. He would later tell his daughters that his crew was always careful not to bomb the cathedral.³² This was the last raid to Cologne which was captured by the Americans four days later.

Three days later, on 6 March, it was Chemnitz and another episode that would have affected Hal deeply. On that ill-fated day 760 aircraft took part. The Bomber Command diary reports that



Image 6: Frank Simon. Flight Engineer
166 and 153 Squadron
Source: Jill Saunders.

The operation started badly when nine aircraft of No 6 Group crashed near their bases soon after taking off in icy conditions. No 426 Squadron, at Linton-on-Ouse, lost 3 out of their 14 Halifaxes taking part in the raid in this way, with only one man surviving. One of the Halifaxes crashed in York, killing some civilians. 22 further aircraft were lost in the main operation - 14 Lancasters and eight Halifaxes.³³

For Hal it was all pretty routine to begin with. He had a new Flight Engineer, McPherson, and he took off at night and dropped his flare markers and bombs over the target at 2137 hours. On the way home he had crossed the English Channel and was flying over southern England alongside another 582 Squadron Lancaster flown by Johnnie Gould when it suddenly exploded in mid-air killing everyone except the rear gunner. For some reason some unused flares had detonated in the bomb bay. Three members of Gould's crew were Australian.

On 8 March the target was Kassel. Kassel's fate was sealed because of the Henschel and Sohn factory which manufactured Tiger tanks as well as the Fiesler aircraft plant and a military headquarters.

³² Emails from Lecia Mettam to the author, dated 8 and 9 February 2021.

³³ Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 5-6 March 1945, NAO.

In March 1945 582 Squadron consisted of 296 officers and aircrew and 235 ground crew. Of the flyers 50 were Canadian, 41 Australian and four New Zealanders. Fourteen men — two whole crews — were killed during the month.³⁴

On 13 March 1945 Hal flew to Herne in the Ruhr where the target was the Erin 'Benzole' (synthetic oil) plant. It was a night operation and Hal reported that 'one large explosion lit up the target for about 10 seconds'.³⁵

It was Hanau on the 18/19 March. Unusually they took off after midnight (on 19 March) and arrived home at dawn. Hal reported that the 'main force bombing [was] very good, even incendiaries well concentrated. Target [was a] sheet of flame when left'. The Bomber Command campaign diary struggled to explain the purpose of this attack. 'No industrial buildings and 2,240 houses were destroyed. The Altstadt was completely devastated and, says the report, all of the town's churches, hospitals, schools and historic buildings were badly hit'.

Tommy MacLachlan was an air gunner with 582 Squadron and he gave Sean Feast, the author of *Master Bombers*, a good description of life in the squadron.

It was an unforgettable experience of comradeship, excitement, laughter and fear all rolled into one. Each day when you woke the first thought that came into your head was 'Will I be flying tonight?' ... In the afternoon we would attend briefing and Little Staughton would be closed down; no outside phone calls [and] no leaving the airfield. The armourers would load the different types of target indicators and bombs [and] the petrol bowsers were busy putting the high octane fuel into the aircraft (1200 gallons for a raid on the Ruhr).

Before take-off the meal was always the same; eggs and chips ... Invariably on the way to the target one could see bombers being shot down by the night-fighters. Over the target was an experience that anyone who has witnessed it will never forget. Searchlights, flak, flares and target indicators all combined to turn night into a huge colourful, beautiful but frightening event. ...When we landed and had been to debriefing, we had another meal and made our way back to our billet although the nervous tension of the past few hours made sleep almost impossible.³⁸

On 24 March the Bomber Command campaign diary observed 'The final phase of the land war opened on this day, with the amphibious crossing of the Rhine on the Wesel sector and the airborne landings among the enemy defences a few hours later'.³⁹ However, the bombing campaign continued. On the same day 177

34 582 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/24.

35 582 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/24.

36 582 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/24.

37 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry, 18-19 March 1945, NAO.

38 Feast, *Master Bombers*, pp. 112-113.

39 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 24 March 1945, NAO.

YEAR		AIRCRAFT		Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	DUTY (Including Results and Remarks)
Month	Date	Type	No.			
Totals Brought Forward						
Nov.						
				* 153. SQUADRON "SCAMPTON"		LINGS ENG.
Nov	2	LANCASTER	P3642	SELF	CREW	⑥ OPS. DÜSSELDORF (RUHR)
"	9	"	N0757	SELF	CREW	⑦ OPS. WANNE-EICKEL. (RUHR)
"	10	"	PB472	SELF	CREW	" BOMBING 10 RUNS.
"	11	"	N0752	SELF	CREW	⑧ OPS DORTMUND (RUHR)
"	13	"	N689	SELF	CREW <small>F10 BARRADINE F13 O'LEARY F15 KENNEDY</small>	BOMBING 7 F14 Sea firing.
"	16	"	N0757	SELF	CREW	⑨ OPS. DÜREN (RUHR)
"	17	"	N6167	SELF	CREW	⑩ OPS. WANNE-EICKEL (RUHR)
"	19	"	N6167.	SELF	CREW	RATTLESDEN (U.S.A.A.F.) & BASE.
"	21	"	P3100	SELF	CREW.	⑪ OPS. ASCHAFFENBURG.
"				SELF	CREW. <small>F15 KENNEDY F15 LOCKYER</small>	FIGHTER AFFILIARY AIR & SEA
"				SELF	CREW	AIR TO SEA FIRING
"			P3642	SELF	CREW	⑫ OPS. FREIBURG

Image 7: Extract from Hal's wartime logbook.
Source: Mettam family.

aircraft attacked the railway yards at Sterkrade so successfully that, according to the war diary, there was ‘complete destruction of a well packed marshalling yard. No aircraft lost’. Sterkrade was Hal’s 29th mission and he dropped his 18 500-pound bombs on the ‘railway sidings’ which he could see through the cloud.⁴⁰

Hal had flown seven operational sorties during the month of March, about one every four days. This equalled the seven he flew with 153 Squadron back in November 1944. This was an exhausting schedule, but it was already clear that the war was won and would only last a few weeks more.

On 4 April Lutzkendorf was Hal’s 30th sortie, which would normally have earned him some leave and a six-month break from operations as 30 sorties comprised one tour in a normal bomber squadron. For Pathfinders however the figure was 45 and, with the war evidently coming to an end, Hal and his crew had to just keep on going.

Hamburg was his destination on 8 April. It was a night operation and the target was the Blohm and Voss shipyard The very next night it was Kiel. 501 Lancasters were involved including 16 from 582 Squadron.

This was an accurate raid, made in good visibility on two aiming points in the harbour area. Photographic reconnaissance showed that the Deutsche Werke U-boat yard was severely damaged, the pocket battleship Admiral Scheer was hit and capsized, the Admiral Hipper and the Emden were badly damaged.⁴¹

40 582 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/24.

41 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 9-10 April 1945, NAO.

From 14 to 16 April Hal and his crew were sent back to Warboys to 1323 Airborne Gun-Laying Turrets (AGLT) Flight for what was presumably a standard refresher course and on 25 April Hal flew his 33rd and final operational sortie. This was to Wangerooge, a raid intended to knock out the coastal batteries on this Frisian island which controlled the approaches to the ports of Bremen and Wilhelmshaven.

On 4 May Hal flew one mission on behalf of Operation MANNA, during which thousands of tons of food were dropped, often from only 500 feet to provide for the half-starved Dutch population. In Hal's case he flew to Rotterdam and would have released his consignment onto Waalhaven airfield and/or Kralingse Plas. During MANNA over 3,000 Lancaster sorties were flown and over 6,000 tons of food dropped. One navigator later wrote 'As we arrived people had gathered already and were waving flags, making signs, etc., doing whatever they could. It was a marvellous sight. As time went on, so there were also messages, such as 'Thank you for coming boys'.⁴²

Hal's final sortie was part of a huge prisoner repatriation scheme known as

EXODUS. This was the only mission he was happy to talk about. It comprised a flight to Germany to collect 24 RAF prisoners of war (PoW) from the thousands who had been marched westwards by the Germans from their Stalag-Luft prison camps being overrun by the advancing Russians.. The war in Europe had ended on 8 May 1945 and on the 10th Hal flew to Lubeck and, for the first time, actually landed on German soil.

As he came into land there was the amazing sight of a whole German panzer division parked on both verges of the road because the tanks had run out of lubricating oil. Although there were hundreds of British aircraft landing at Lubeck there was a natural concern



Image 8: Hal (left) with Keith Saladine
Source: Mettam family.

that some Germans might fire at them. A squadron of Focke Wulf 190s was located nearby and aware of their presence. In the end all went well and Hal flew the PoWs to England.⁴³ His logbook states that he flew them to Sieford, but this was probably RAF Seighford, an air station near Stafford.

Reading the 582 Squadron Operations Record Book for May 1945 one can feel the sense of deflation after the intensity of the previous months and years. They tried to keep the crews busy with 'Cooks Tours' which gave the ground crew in the squadron the chance to see German cities from the air. There were also some cross-country flights and some training. Pathfinder badges were awarded. Hal left the squadron on 17 June the day after Barton, Lockyer and Saladine.⁴⁴

He was sent to No 9 Aircrew Holding Unit at Gamston, Nottinghamshire, which was the main camp for repatriating RAAF personnel. Crews were sent there before departure to either the Pacific theatre of war or more often to be sent home via No 11 Personnel Reception and Despatch Centre in Brighton, which occupied the Grand and Metropole hotels on the seafront.

It was during this period of enforced relaxation that, according to Hal's daughters, 'he enrolled as an extra at Pinewood Studios, gained his actor's Equity card and appeared in films including *The Way to the Stars* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*. He became quite friendly with some of the actors there, including David Niven, Stewart Granger and Deborah Kerr'.⁴⁵

Hal set off home on 11 November aboard the SS *Orion* crammed with Australian troops. Only three days later the ship had to return to port with mechanical problems, but there were also complaints of overcrowding. There was a question in the British parliament to which the government responded

She sailed from Southampton on 11 November, but owing to damage to her machinery, had to return. I am glad to inform the House that another ship has been allocated, but it will be some two or three weeks before the ship will sail. It must be realised that, so long as the present pressure on passenger space continues, there must be some sacrifice of comfort if men are to be got home within a reasonable period, and it will not always be possible to provide cabin accommodation for every officer.⁴⁶

Hal departed again on 30 November 1945 aboard the SS *Athlone Castle* and arrived back in Australia on 28 December. He was still only a Flight Lieutenant, but he had been through the most intense experience imaginable and without losing a single member of his crew.

After the war Hal spent all of his career flying. He began with Guinea Air

43 Bomber Command Campaign Diary, entry 9-10 April 1945, NAO.

44 582 Squadron Operations Record Book, NA AIR 27/1029/27

45 From Hal Mettam's funeral oration by Lecia Mettam July 2011.

46 *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Commons), 19 November 1945, vol 416.

Traders and, after another spell with the RAAF, he joined Qantas in 1952 and Malayan Airways from 1953 graduating from Dakotas to Viscounts. Later he flew in the Caribbean with British West Indian Airways before his longest spell with MEA. In his later years he attended squadron reunions in Lincoln. In 2007 he was reunited with Ned Kennedy thanks to the efforts of Jill Saunders. Sadly Frank had died in 1973. Hal himself passed away in 2011 and Ned Kennedy was the last to go in 2015.

Hal was very alive to the controversy which surrounded the bombing strategy of Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris. Although he admired Harris (and once met him) he was certainly conscious of the death and destruction which heavy bombing caused in German cities and he developed a hatred for war which he witnessed again in Lebanon in the late 1970s. However, he understood that his was a total war against an evil regime. Like many Australians he had little time for Winston Churchill, whom he blamed for the Australian casualties at Gallipoli, but also for neglecting the credit due to Harris and Bomber Command for their major role in winning the war.⁴⁷

His reluctance to talk about his wartime experiences owed something to the damage caused to Germany. In no sense was he anti-German and he sent both his daughters to school in Bavaria. He even asked for the German version of *Lili Marlene* to be played at his funeral.

Hal must have retained painful memories of those crews that never returned from operational sorties. Nonetheless, he was an active supporter of the Bomber Command memorial in London’s Hyde Park and he was particularly proud to have been a Pathfinder.

Anybody who knew Hal, his professionalism and his calmness would understand why his crew both trusted and respected him. The most remarkable aspect is that he was still only 20 when the war in Europe came to an end.



Image 8: Close-up of 582 Squadron May 1945
Source: RAF Pathfinders Archive.

⁴⁷ Author’s discussion with Hal Mettam, 10 May 2010.

Soldiering on the North-West Frontier of India

Brian Downing¹

Introduction

Since ancient times the North-West Frontier of India, along parts of its border with Afghanistan, has been repeatedly invaded due to its strategic location. After Russia had established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1837 Britain feared that Russia may in fact expand its area of interest into India through the North-West Frontier. This led to the First Anglo-Afghan war of 1839-1842. At that time this region was occupied by Ranjit Singh, a Sikh ruler, who spent much of his time fighting the Afghans in an attempt to drive them out of the Punjab.

Britain's involvement in India evolved from the presence of the East India Company. A powerful commercial trading enterprise founded in 1600, it had its own army and enrolled local Indians who became nominally British and were called sepoy. In 1849 Britain annexed the Punjab. This led to a succession of punitive expeditions against Pashtun tribes who inhabited the region and started further wars against Afghanistan. This paper deals with the British military campaign against the Pathan (Pushtun or Afridi) tribes from 1897 to 1898. It is also called the Tirah Expedition. It concentrates on the portrayal of the harsh living and fighting conditions experienced by ordinary soldiers, whilst little attention is given to purely military aspects that are fully described through eyewitness accounts by HD Hutchinson,² Lionel James,³ and Leonard Shadwell.⁴

This North-West Frontier district is now part of the Khyber Pakhtun Khwa (KPK), being a federally administered tribal area of Pakistan, independent since 1947, and it is still populated by Afridi tribes.

Outbreak of the Campaign

Various explanations have been given as to the causes of the conflict. One reason was that the local inhabitants feared that the British meant to permanently occupy their region as a prelude to the destruction of their independence and way of

1 Peter Hopper kindly gave significant editorial comment.

2 H.D. Hutchinson, *The Campaign in Tirah 1897-1898: An account of the Expedition against the Orakzais and Afridis*, Macmillan and Co: London (1898).

3 Lionel James, *The Indian Frontier War being an account of the Mohmund and Tirah Expeditions 1897*, William Heinemann: London (1898).

4 Leonard Shadwell, *Lockhart's Advance through Tirah*, W Thacker & Co: London (1898).

life. There was also a feeling among the tribes that Britain may seek to extend Christianity into the region. An Afridi tribe had in fact received a subsidy from the government of British India to safeguard the Khyber Pass that provided a passage between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This created a potentially dangerous situation.

In July 1897 a large Afridi force attacked the British fort at Malakand in the Swat valley. It took four days for the British forces to drive them off but it was to no avail and eventually all the British forts on the Khyber were overrun and captured the following month. This provoked an immediate British response. General Sir William Lockhart, commander of the Punjab Army Corps – consisting of 34,882 men, British and Indian, in addition to 20,000 followers – was ordered to punish the rebellious tribes and restore order in the Tirah region lying between the Khyber Pass and the Khanki valley.

It took several months to create a depot at Kohat (located towards the bottom left corner of map in Image 1) for the materiel that was necessary for the campaign and to recruit thousands of troops garrisoned throughout India. Transport proved to be another huge task due to the fact that 45,000 draft animals, horses and ponies, together with their fodder, would have to be assembled. Animals and men would then have to traverse over rugged terrain in order to attack the enemy. It was a large and cumbersome force, needing substantial and extended supply columns. Its movements were thus easily predicted by the Afridi.

The Tirah campaign was conducted in part of the Hindu Kush comprising the most extreme kinds of landform on Earth, including some of the highest peaks adjacent to the deepest valleys of the western Himalaya. Glaciers and rivers draining mostly south or south-east towards the Indus River, further eroding and shaping this rugged landscape (see Image 2).

Nature of Fighting Between Afridi And British

The Pashtun speaking tribes (notably Afridi, Orakzai and Shinwari) produced tough warriors who lived in fortified villages with observation towers. They were fearless, highly mobile, and proved to be expert snipers. These uncompromising tribes were strongly independent, resentful of outside interference and were often at loggerheads with each other. In summer they moved their flocks to reach traditional grazing areas; but freezing temperatures in winter confined them to the low valleys (less than 2000 m above sea level) suitable for cultivation and irrigation.⁵

The British forces under Lockhart, set out to plunder the region by seizing supplies of fodder, grain, firewood and timber. The tribal watch towers were also

5 E Ehlers and Hermann Kruezmänn, 'High mountain ecology and economy: potential and constraints'. In E Ehlers and Hermann Kruezmänn (eds), *High Mountain Pastoralism in Northern Pakistan*, Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart (2000), p. 23.



Image 1: This map shows some geographic features noticed along the route taken by Lockhart's army during the Tirah campaign. Source: Public domain.

to be burned. The Afridi retaliated swiftly, silently and secretly by attacking the British columns. Highly experienced through plenty of practice, the Afridi, when not united against a common foe, these tribesmen were generally fighting against each other. It was also essential for the British to recover their dead or wounded to avoid them being tortured, mutilated and murdered.⁶ Recovery of one soldier required a detail of five comrades, quite apart from the additional soldiers needed to keep an aggressive enemy at bay.

Major Actions

October 1897

On 18 October 1897 the British set out to dislodge Afridi who had gathered in strength across the top of a cliff face in the Dargai Heights. Progress was slow as the British troops were exposed to fire whilst crossing a narrow neck of land. However, by the end of the month they had reached the Tirah valley. Many casualties reflected the bravery of the soldiers. One of the Victoria Crosses awarded went to Piper

⁶ Robert Masters and Eduard Lea, *Perverse Crimes in History: Evolving concepts of sadism, lust-murder, and necrophilia from ancient to modern times*, Julian Press: New York (1963), p. 19.



Image 2: Nanga Parbat, the western anchor of the Himalaya mountain chain, located on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border peaks at 8126 m. The mountain image is reflected on the waters of Fairy Meadows Lake. Source: Tahsin Anwar Ali, Creative Commons.

George Findlater, who, although shot through

both legs, continued to play whilst sitting on the ground. He later claimed he was told to play ‘Cock of the North’ but preferred instead ‘The Haughts o’ Cromdale’.

November 1897

Two large British divisions were then used to successfully destroy the walled and fortified hamlets of the Afridi. A third division then moved into the Waran valley destroying more villages. It was, however, slow and progress was difficult. Almost daily the Afridis, too wise to risk general engagements, waged continual guerrilla warfare along the road leading to the Rajgad valley that was exceedingly difficult to traverse. The last task undertaken was to carry out the punishment of the rebels. Some groups resisted resulting in further British casualties.

There was time, however, for relief in the form of a grand dinner on St Andrews Day (30 November) and a Sports’ Day involving an inter-regimental tug-of-war.

The objective of Lockhart was now to evacuate the Tirah region and return home, so to speak. This proved to be the most difficult part of the campaign. The return march that began on 9 December lasted for five days. It was incredibly difficult and will be discussed later on in this paper.

A prerequisite for evacuation was to negotiate peace conditions with the Afridi. On 12 November, the Gar Orakzai *jirgahs* (tribal councils) met to discuss a peace offer; these jirgas represented the whole of the Orakzai clans so were received in state by Sir William Lockhart, attended by his Chief of Staff, some political advisers, and all headquarters staff. Adding further to this spectacular display was an honour guard by 100 rank and file of Gordon Highlanders.⁷

The *jirgahs* agreed to the peace conditions: mainly the payment of a fine in 50,000 rupees and the surrender of their 800 modern, breech-loading rifles. They also had to agree not to negotiate or do deals with any other power than Britain, and that they would permit the construction of railway lines or roads in the region. In return, the British would resume paying monthly allowances to the tribal chiefs for maintaining the agreement.

Rejection of the peace offer would result in Lockhart returning to Tirah the following Spring to again damage Afridi resources by destroying rebuilt towers, by allowing army animals to feed on new crops, and by preventing sowing of the next season's crops. These actions would severely impact the elderly, women and children. The Afridi tribes had already suffered significant punishment: large quantities of their forage and grain eaten, many towers and fortified houses burned, large amounts of timber used as firewood, and many trees destroyed.

December 1897: British Withdrawal

After the conclusion of peace and with winter threatening, the British forces started withdrawing in a southerly direction along the Bara valley. However, they found themselves in freezing conditions. Although they wore khaki coats lined with flannel, Balaclava helmets and worsted gloves, they were forced to find ways to avoid the extreme cold at high altitude. One officer described his shelter as 'a hole dug in the ground about three feet deep and walled up on one side by bags filled with earth. Over them my bivouac tent forms a roof, and under my waterproof sheet I have nine inches of straw'.⁸ However, relentless attacks by a determined enemy, the Zakka Khels, resulted in a terrible tale of hardship, exposure and conflict said to be one of the severest marches in British military experience during the century.⁹

The morning of 11 December dawned cold and miserable, sleeting hard with hilltops a few hundred feet above camp wrapped in snow. By now, tired-out Gordon Highlanders had been in action continuously from dawn until well after dark. A rear guard of 350 Gordons under Major Downman was cut off with only five weak infantry companies. Their situation worsened when surrounded by enemy and when burdened with their own wounded. Men and officers themselves carried

7 Hutchinson, *The Campaign in Tirah 1897-1898*, pp. 129-130 and pp. 234-140.

8 Greenhill Gardyne, *The Life of a Regiment: The History of the Gordon Highlanders from 1816 to 1898*. Vol II, David Douglas: Edinburgh (1903), p 359.

stretcher cases abandoned by local carriers. An emboldened enemy closed within a few yards of Downman's perimeter leaving no troops available to guard his flanks. At the same time, an isolated Captain Uniacke with a few Gordons sought refuge in an enemy house but needed first to displace at bayonet point its occupants. Other remnants, including dead or wounded, were also brought in. Terrified local carriers who lost the road were less fortunate. They deserted as tribesmen closed in, to loot, shoot some, and strip others naked so leaving them to die of exposure. Despite searches during the night, remnants of the rear guard were found and recovered only on 12 December. They had endured a terrible night, unable to light a fire, and were wet to the waist. Forty one casualties were recorded for the day including two wounded officers. Fourteen Gordon troops had been wounded and four had been killed. An unspecified number of followers died, whilst many stores and baggage animals were lost. A reception given to the survivors was described by Lionel James:

On the 14th December, the 3rd Brigade marched into Swaikot (Barkai) to be given full military honour by General Sir William Lockhart and guards. Colonel Mathias led his Gordon Highlanders. Troops in the camp massed on each side of the roadway to cheer their campaign-stained comrades; it was almost pathetic to see men of the Inniskillings and Oxfords passing cakes, bread, cheese and hot cocoa to their thoroughly, battle worn comrades. This depressing sight reflected the dark side of war for the men were all drawn, pinched, and dishevelled. Fit and hard, but their faces bore undoubted marks of the awful time which they had just experienced. The dead and wounded followed, mostly carried on stretchers or beds seized from villages; other wounded with pale drawn faces and wincing in agony, rode on rough hospital mules.¹⁰

The Tirah Campaign Ends

The expeditionary force was disbanded on 4 April 1898. The whole campaign cost the lives of 314 Anglo-Indian soldiers with a further 925 being listed as wounded. General Lockhart himself returned to India, was appointed as Commander-in-Chief only to die within a year – likely a result of his exertions on the North-West Frontier. So ended the Tirah Campaign.

However, resilient bands of frontier tribesmen remained defiant. The resulting situation looked more like a rout imposed by an enemy rather than a victorious withdrawal by a punitive British force. The British nevertheless succeeded on several accounts by the partial suppression of some Afridi tribes, by regaining some control of the Khyber Pass and by reducing the opportunity for foreign incursion – at least for the time being.

9 James, *The Indian Frontier War*, pp 243-254.

10 Francis Ingall, *The Last of the Bengal Lancers*, Pen and Sword: Barnsley (1988), pp. 52-55.

Nonetheless, British military activity continued well into the 20th century against the Afridi in areas earlier involved with the Tirah campaign. For example, Brigadier Ingall records how in 1930 as a lieutenant he led his cavalry squadron of Bengal Lancers in a charge against Afridi, this event claimed to be the last cavalry (horseback) charge of the British Army.

Social And Political Conclusions

Even after the partition of India in 1947, Pashtun tribesmen have continued to access their traditional pastures by easily crossing porous boundaries between Afghanistan and Pakistan that allowed conflict to spill over (see Image 3). Did Afridi tribes assist the Mujahideen in their defeat of the Soviet Union during the Soviet-Afghanistan war of 1979-1989? Did a similar situation arise in 2001 in the wake of terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban? The United States and other nations, including Australia, have responded with military operations in Afghanistan. Furthermore, current press reports make reference to attacks upon Pakistan's national troops in the frontier region.¹¹

Now what can we conclude from the Tirah expedition? Far from resolving instability in the region it demonstrated how a military force could not achieve peace in a place where two societies and cultures are opposed to each other. The region was destined to remain unstable and it is no surprise that the Taliban now use it as a sanctuary.



Image 3: A Pushtun herder with his flock (middle distance) wanders across the unmarked, Afghanistan/Pakistan border to access traditional pastures. Note his tartan patterned scarf and turban – Scottish Highland regiments often served in this region during the 19th century. The soil surface is degraded and the vegetation is over-eaten by livestock. Source: Aithor.

11 See Salman Bangash, 'Frontier Wars during the British Rule in India (1849-1898): A Critical Appraisal', *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, 63 (2015): 65-82.

The Loss of RAAF Boston A28-20, Gona, Papua, November 1942

Daniel J. Leahy¹

Introduction

The term ‘aviation archaeology’ has been broadly defined as ‘the investigation of material remains associated with the act of flying’. Some have suggested that such archaeological investigation is not necessary as all has been recorded within the written historical record.² Unfortunately, this is simply not the case. While the historical record is of course invaluable, an aircraft wreck’s value as an historic artefact from which information about the aircraft itself and the circumstances of its loss cannot be understated.³ This paper will discuss a multi-disciplinary approach of analysing both the historical record and surviving physical artefacts to gain a more complete understanding about the 1942 loss of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Boston A28-20 and the larger ground battle in which it was engaged.

The aircraft

The Douglas DB-7/A-20 series of aircraft has been described as one of the most widely used and important – yet also one of the least known – strike aircraft operated during the Second World War.⁴ Designed and built by the Douglas Aircraft Company in California, the Douglas Model 7B prototype first flew on 26 October 1938.⁵ The initial versions of the aircraft type were powered by Pratt & Whitney R-1830 Twin Wasp engines, though these were upgraded to Wright R-2600 Twin Cyclones in 1939 which were used to power the vast majority of the type. The DB-7 and A-20

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2 Carl Hoffman, ‘Whose planes are they, anyway?’, *Air & Space*, 13, (1998), p. 42.

3 Vince Holyoak and John Schofield, *Military Aircraft Crash Sites: Archaeological Guidance on their Significance and Future Management*, English Heritage: Swindon (2002), p. 2.

4 Scott Thompson, *Douglas Havoc and Boston: The DB-7/A-20 Series*, Crowood: Marlborough (2004), p. 7; Stewart Wilson, *Aircraft of WWII*, Aerospace Publications: Fyshwick (1998), p. 59.

5 Wilson, *Aircraft of WWII*, p. 59.



Image 1: Three Douglas Bostons of No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, flying over Goodenough Island, 1943. Source: State Library of Victoria, H98.104/3877.

series of aircraft would ultimately serve with the air forces of France, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, Australia, Canada, and the USSR.⁶

The RAAF received a total of 69 DB-7 and A-20 aircraft during the Second World War with whom the type was only flown on combat operations by No. 22 Squadron, RAAF.⁷ The first Bostons received by the RAAF were part of a batch of 32 that were initially intended for the Royal Air Force (RAF), but were to be delivered to the Royal Netherlands East Indies Air Force for their war against the Japanese in what is now Indonesia.⁸ With the impending fall of Java, 22 of these aircraft were instead diverted to Australia as ‘refugee cargo’ and arrived by ship during March and April 1942.⁹ Despite the fact that these aircraft were not initially ordered by the RAAF, they were used to great effect in the low-level ground attack and strafing role by No. 22 Squadron in Papua and New Guinea. During March

6 Wilson, *Aircraft of WWII*, p. 59.

7 Mark Harbour, ‘RAAF A28 Douglas DB-7B, A-20A, A-20C & A20G Boston’, ADF-Serials, 2019, <http://www.adf-serials.com.au/2a28.htm>, accessed 26 September 2020; Thompson, *Douglas Havoc and Boston*, p. 98; Stewart Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator in Australian Service*, Aerospace Publications: Weston Creek (1992), pp. 24-25.

8 Harbour, ‘RAAF A28’; Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator*, p. 24.

9 Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator*, p. 24.

1943, Flight Lieutenant William Ellis Newton took part in Boston operations over Salamaua that would later see him posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross – the RAAF's only recipient of this award in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War.¹⁰ The Boston – and later A-20 Havoc variants of the aircraft – would continue to be utilised by the RAAF until early 1945.¹¹

The individual aircraft that is the subject of this paper was a Boston Mk. III built under licence by the Boeing Company. Assigned constructor's number 2750 the aircraft was first assigned RAF serial AL369 before being shipped to Australia. Received by No. 2 Aircraft Depot, RAAF, at Richmond on 13 April 1942 the aircraft was subsequently renumbered as A28-20.¹² The aircraft was received by No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, on 29 August 1942 and arrived at Port Moresby on 11 November 1942.¹³ During the period 15-26 November 1942 Boston A28-20 successfully completed a total of five missions against Japanese positions on the north coast of Papua.¹⁴

The mission

By the end of November 1942, Australian ground forces had reoccupied the Kokoda plateau and were fighting alongside their American allies to eliminate Japanese resistance along the northern beachheads of Papua around the villages of Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. On the morning of 29 November 1942, an air raid on Japanese held positions around Gona was to be undertaken by aircraft from units of both the RAAF and the US 5th Air Force. This was to be immediately followed by an attack on Gona Mission conducted by members of the 21st Australian Infantry Brigade approaching the area along the beach from the east.

No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, was to participate in the air raid by sending three Douglas Bostons from their base at Ward's Strip, Port Moresby, to fly across the Owen Stanley Range and then on to attack 'specified enemy ground positions in [the] Gona area'.¹⁵ The aircraft and known aircrew in question were A28-9, piloted

10 Steve Eather, *Flying Squadrons of the Australian Defence Force*, Aerospace Publications: Weston Creek (1995), p. 58; Douglas Gillison, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, Australian War Memorial: Canberra (1962), p. 699.

11 Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator*, p. 50.

12 Record Card-Airframes, Aero Engines, Mechanical Transport and Marine Craft (RAAF Form E/E.88) for Boston A28-20, National Archives of Australia (NAA), A10297, Block 211; Harbour, 'RAAF A28'.

13 Operations Record Book (RAAF Form A.50) for No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, November 1942, NAA, A9186, 45; RAAF Form E/E.88 for Boston A28-20.

14 Unit History Sheet: Detail of Operations (RAAF Form A.51) for No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, November 1942, NAA, A9186, 45.

15 RAAF Form A.51 for No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, November 1942, NAA, A9186, 45.

by Squadron Leader Charles Cuthbertson Learmonth with Flight Sergeant Harold James Burn as gunner; A28-20 crewed by Flying Officer Herbert James Bullmore, Sergeant John William McKay, and Sergeant Ian Cameron Stodart; and A28-11 flown by Flying Officer Henry Brown 'Harry' Craig and his crew.¹⁶ Upon reaching the target area the formation formed a protective circle over the target and waited for the call to attack. When this call came, Flying Officer Bullmore's aircraft was in the most favourable position and therefore took the lead, followed by Squadron Leader Learmonth. While over the target at an altitude of approximately 800-1000 feet (244-305 metres) the aircraft was seen to explode.¹⁷ Learmonth's biographer, Charles Page, described the explosion in detail as follows:

Everything between the tail and the forward nose disintegrated. The tail fell away first, followed by fragments of fuselage and then the nose, which was streaming flames. Quite bizarrely, the wing with its two engines had no idea it had become separated, and carried on flying for some distance, with the engines still running, the propellers thrashing the air, and a plume of flames and smoke trailing behind.¹⁸

A member of the 21st Australian Infantry Brigade who had been observing the attack from the ground described the aircraft as crashing 'into shallow water near the beach'.¹⁹ On the ground, Japanese officers witnessed the fate of the Boston – Probationary Officer Tamano thought that one aircraft had been shot down by ground fire, while Lieutenant Kiroyuki Fujitani correctly surmised that the aircraft had disintegrated in flight.²⁰ Despite the loss of A28-20, the Australian official historian, Douglas Gillison, described the attack as a 'perfectly executed air strike'.²¹ Although impossible to see from the air, Japanese records indicated that the attack had destroyed the headquarters of the Yamasaki Company and that the unit's commander, Lieutenant Yoshi Yamasaki, along with Master Sergeant Toda were subsequently listed as missing.²²

At first it was reported that all three crew members were 'missing, believed

16 Charles Page, *Wings of Destiny: Wing Commander Charles Learmonth, DFC and Bar and the Air War in New Guinea*, Rosenberg Publishing: Dural (2008), p. 168.

17 Letter from S/Ldr Charles Learmonth to Mrs. M. McKay, Mount Isa, dated 8 December 1942, NAA, A705, 163/141/847.

18 Page, *Wings of Destiny*, pp. 168-170.

19 Letter from F/Lt Smith, No. 22 Squadron, Port Moresby to No. 1 BPSO, Townsville, dated 6 December 1942, NAA, A705, 163/141/847.

20 Lex McAulay, *To the Bitter End: The Japanese Defeat at Buna and Gona 1942-43*, Random House Australia: Milsons Point (1992), p. 78.

21 Dudley McCarthy, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: South-West Pacific Area – First Year: Kokoda to Wau*, Australian War Memorial: Canberra (1959), p. 428.

22 McAulay, *To the Bitter End*, p. 78.

killed'.²³ Within days the bodies of the crew were located with F/O Bullmore being buried on 30 November and the remaining two crew members on 1 December 1942. The location of the crew's initial burial was located near the aircraft crash, simply described on their individual Graves Registration Cards as being 'across tidal creek near beach'.²⁴ In June 1943 their remains were reinterred at the Gona War Cemetery before again being reburied at the Soputa War Cemetery in June 1944. Ultimately, with the consolidation of all war cemeteries in the Territory of Papua, the remains of the three crew members were finally reinterred at the Bomana War Cemetery, Port Moresby, on 24 November 1946, where they rest to this day.²⁵

This was the third Boston of No. 22 Squadron, RAAF, to have exploded in mid-air while conducting an attack run. The cause of the explosion was determined to be due to the use of 20-pound fragmentation bombs which, when entering the slipstream below the aircraft, were blown back against the others due to their light weight, in turn causing a premature and catastrophic detonation.²⁶ After the loss of A28-20 the munition type was withdrawn from use and such an incident never occurred again.²⁷

The wreck

While travelling in Papua New Guinea as a tourist in 2005, the author visited the site of an unknown aircraft wreck located just behind the beach, north of the entrance to the Gona Creek in Oro Province. Although the wreck had been visited by other researchers prior, it had simply been described as consisting of one 'wing and one engine' and was therefore tentatively identified as that of an unknown RAAF Wirraway or Japanese Zero.²⁸ However, during the author's 2005 visit to the site, the remains of one wing; two radial engines – each identified as being 14-cylinder Wright R-2600 Twin Cyclones (Figure 2); and an 'L' shaped undercarriage leg were located in the vicinity.

23 Letter from F/O K. Hardiman, No. 1 BPSO, Townsville, to Secretary, Air Board, Melbourne, dated 9 December 1942, NAA, A705, 163/141/847.

24 Graves Registration Cards for Ian Cameron Stodart (C5.F8), Herbert James Bullmore (C6.A.5), and John William McKay (C6.A.22), NAA, A8234, 25.

25 Pacific Wrecks, 'DB-7B Boston Mark III Serial Number A28-20', *Pacific Wrecks*, 2020, <https://www.pacificwrecks.com/aircraft/a-20/A28-20.html>, accessed 13 January 2021.

26 Gillison, *RAAF 1939-1942*, pp. 638-639; Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator*, p. 32.

27 Eather, *Flying Squadrons*, p. 57; Gillison, *RAAF 1939-1942*, p. 639; Wilson, *Boston, Mitchell and Liberator*, p. 32.

28 Pacific Wrecks, 'Gona', *Pacific Wrecks*, 2004, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20050209213922/https://www.pacificwrecks.com/provinces/png_gona.html, accessed 26 September 2020.



Figure 2: 14-cylinder Wright R-2600 Twin Cyclone radial engine located at the wreck site. Source: J.R. Taylan/Pacific Wrecks, 2005.

The author returned to the site the following year and identified the remains of a RAAF type roundel painted on one side of the wing (Figure 3a). Based on the dimensions of the outer ring to the inner circle being approximately 5:2, this would represent a RAF Type B roundel, or the similarly scaled RAAF Pacific roundel, introduced in July 1942, that was painted on the upper surface of the wing.²⁹ The marking had been protected from the elements due to the wing landing flat on the ground in an inverted position. Bolts located on the wing (Figure 3b) were of American construction and marked with AN (Army-Navy) standard identifiers.³⁰ Unfortunately, nothing more could be located that might shed light on the identity of the individual aircraft or its crew.

29 John Bennett, 'The kangaroo roundel that we love', *ADF Serials Telegraph News*, vol. 6, (2016), pp. 7-8.

30 Ron Alexander, 'Aircraft hardware: what you need to know', *EAA Sport Aviation*, March 1998, reproduced at <http://www.zenithair.com/kit-data/ra/hardware.html>, accessed 26 September 2020.

However, the fragmentary nature of this wreck, which had been spread over a wide area, suggests that the aircraft in question exploded in mid-air, falling to the earth in pieces. This, along with the types of engines and undercarriage found; the RAAF roundel; parts suggesting that the aircraft was made in the United States; and the location of the site matching the previously documented historical description, all indicate that the wreckage is in fact what remained of RAAF Boston A28-20. No other American-made twin-engine RAAF aircraft were lost in the immediate vicinity.

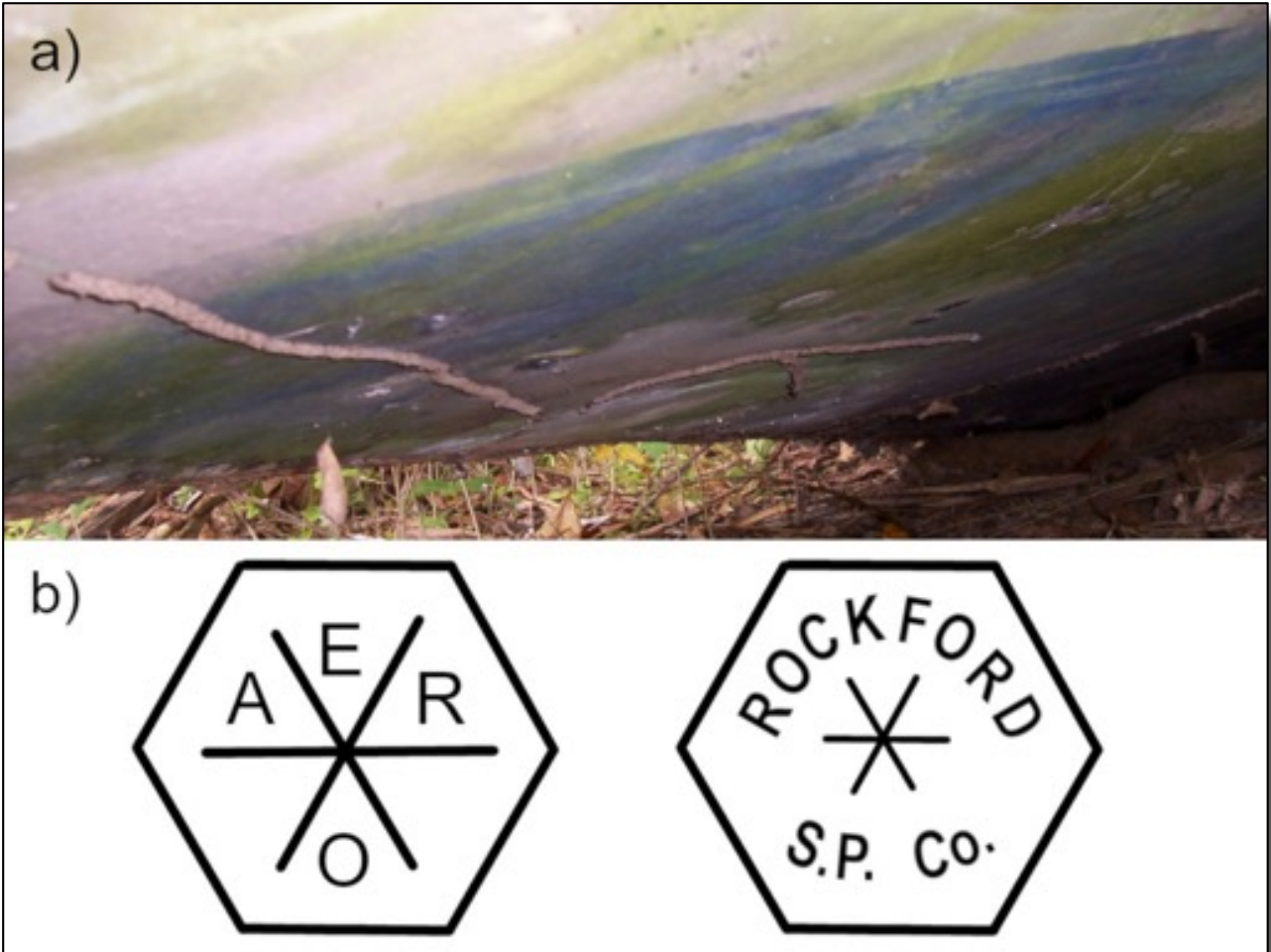


Figure 3a: Surviving roundel painted on aircraft wing wreckage
Figure 3b: Examples of bolts with standard U.S. Army-Navy (AN) identifiers located on wing wreckage. Source: Author.

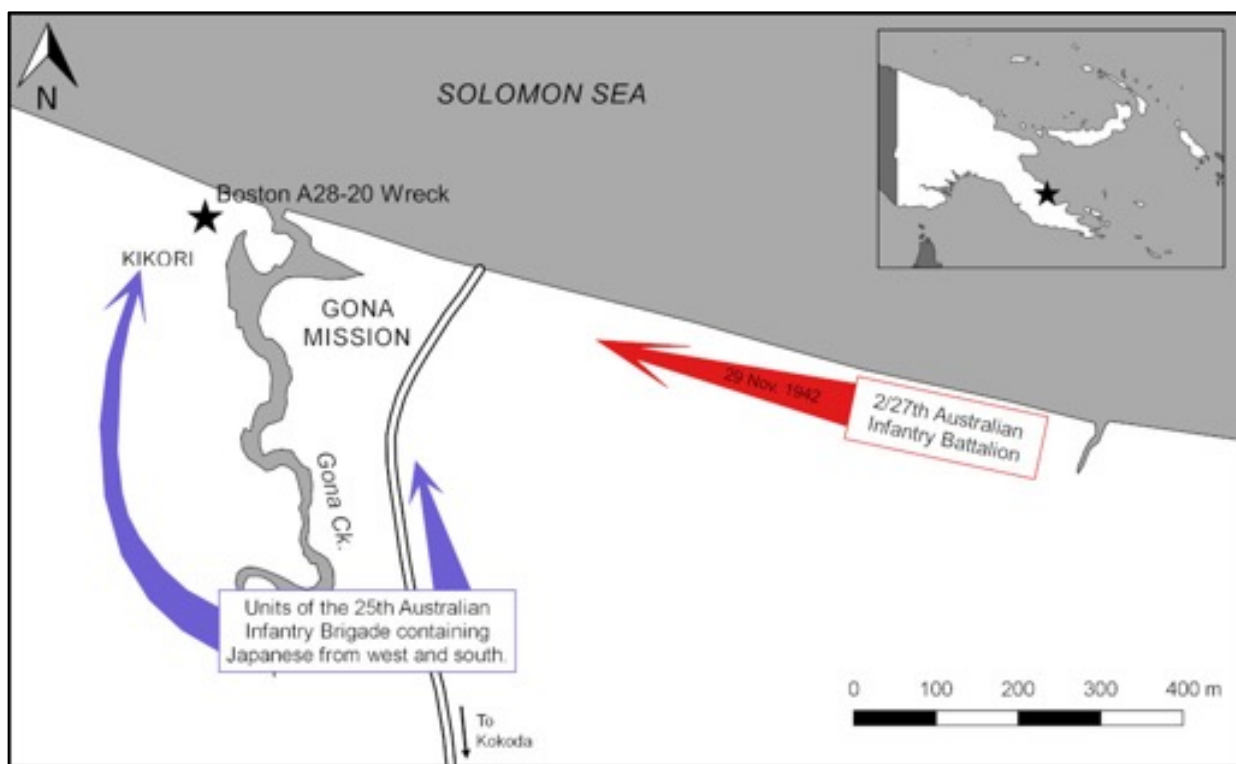


Figure 4: Map showing the position of the wreck visited in 2005 and 2006 in relation to troop movements of 29 November 1942. Source: Author, after AWM52, 8/2/21.

Discussion

By confirming the identity of the aircraft wreckage near Gona it has been possible to pinpoint its exact location and plot that within the current landscape. Further study of Australian Brigade and Battalion maps from the period has allowed the disposition and movement of ground forces on the day of the battle to be mapped in context with the location of the wreck and its environment (Figure 4).

This process has, in turn, suggested the location of the target area that the Boston pilot had intended to attack at the time of the aircraft's loss. The area to the west of Gona Creek – where the aircraft ultimately crashed – was, at the time, held by Japanese forces that were being contained by members of the 25th Australian Infantry Brigade located in positions to the south and to the west. This, however, was not the main area of attack for the 2/27th Australian Infantry Battalion that was to approach Gona Mission along the beach from the east, and who came under attack from Japanese positions located on that side of the creek. This is in line with Peter Brune's statements about the air support offered on the day, in that those taking part – both in the air and on the ground – were unaware of the exact positions being held

by the Japanese, and that there was no way of communicating this information to the aircraft from the ground.³¹ Although Lex McAulay has recorded that the air raid caused the loss of Japanese lives and damage to Japanese materiel, the positions that were attacked had already being contained by the 25th Brigade. It could therefore be argued that such an air attack could have been better employed by attacking Japanese forces east of the Gona Creek, in turn providing direct support to the 2/27th Battalion.

Conclusion

This paper has used a multi-disciplinary approach to document the loss of RAAF Boston A28-20 near Gona on 29 November 1942. It has shown that it is possible to identify an unknown Second World War aircraft wreck by analysing both the surviving artefacts located at the site and the historical record. Plotting the exact location of the wreck in relationship to historical details about the movement of ground forces on the day of the aircraft's loss has also shed further light on the attack in which the aircraft and its crew took part.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the people of Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, in particular to those of the Gona and Girewo regions for their assistance in accessing the wreck site in both 2005 and 2006. Thanks also to Justin Taylan and Mark Wilson for accompanying me during my visits to the site, and to Phillip Bradley and Edward Rogers for providing further information which has assisted with this research.

31 Peter Brune, *A Bastard of a Place: The Australians in Papua*, (2nd edn), Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest (2004), p. 446.

They Answered Their Country's Call

Kevin Driscoll

When war was formally declared on 4 August 1914, it appears from the newspapers there was initially very little reaction from the people of Greta, New South Wales. Greta appears to have been concentrating on the local coal mines and the fact that a miner, George Brooker, was seriously injured in an accident at Broxburn mine on 1 August 1914.¹ Brooker recovered from his injuries and later joined the AIF. The Whitburn miners were on strike with strike pay amounting to £2, along with the usual allowances for children being paid on 28 July 1914.² It was only on 20 August 1914 when the newspapers started mentioning men with previous military service returning to the Army.

The Greta Council, on its own initiative, formed the Greta Citizen's Committee to record the names of the local men who volunteered for military service. During September 1915 it was decided to give Cyril McCrea a public send-off. The decision was reported in *The Maitland Weekly Mercury* of 4 September 1915 as follows:

It was unanimously decided to give a public send-off to Private Cyril McRae (sic) son of Sergeant McCrea who is on final leave of absence, and also present all young men from here with a gold medal, suitably inscribed, all to be of the same style and value.

Towards the end of 1915, the New South Wales Government strongly suggested the setting up of War Service Committees in communities to encourage recruiting. Greta initially rejected the government's approach as its Citizen's Committee was already carrying out those functions. However, after the intervention of Mr. Catts, chairman of the State Recruiting Committee, the Greta War Service Committee was formed.³

Under the direction of the State Recruiting Committee, at least 265 recruiting associations were established during 1915/1916. The primary duties of the Greta War Service Committee as directed by the State Recruiting Committee were:

Each recruiting association supervised recruitment within its own town, as well as acting as a central hub for smaller surrounding towns. These smaller towns,

1 'Greta', *The Maitland Weekly Mercury*, 8 August 1914, p. 13.

2 'Greta', *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, 30 July 1914, p. 7.

3 'Greta', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 13 January 1916, p. 7.

or ‘affiliates’, were led by the local police and education department officers. An association’s primary function involved identifying, securing, and arranging the transfer of recruits (through local police) to Sydney or the nearest military recruiting depot for enlistment.

The secondary duties of the association were to:

- a. Arrange for the distribution of recruitment posters;
- b. Circulation of patriotic and similar materials;
- c. Arrange public meetings to appeal to potential recruits; and
- d. Arrange patriotic demonstrations such as send-offs for local recruits.

Greta ANZAC Memorial

The decision to erect an ANZAC memorial was reached at a public meeting held in the Greta Council Chambers on the evening of 11 April 1916. It was decided to erect an obelisk, and Mr. J. Proudfoot and Mr. W. Veitch would carry out the work.⁴ The

following week, on 18 April 1916, a meeting of the Greta ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee was advised by the sub-committee entrusted with erecting the obelisk, the work could not be completed by 25 April 1916, in time for ANZAC Day celebrations. It was subsequently decided to unveil the foundation stone of the memorial on 25 April 1916.⁵

The foundation stone of the Greta Memorial Obelisk was unveiled on 25 April 1916 and the first ANZAC Day was celebrated. The town clerk read a record of the chief events of the town, which had been drafted by him, and written on parchment by Constable Butler, a local police officer. The record stated the obelisk was to commemorate their fellow citizens who had enlisted from Greta to assist in upholding the dear old flag of ‘Old England’ and the parchment would be hermetically sealed and deposited in a cavity in the foundation stone.

The War Memorial Committee fixed 1 July 1916 as the day for the ceremony of unveiling the memorial and invited Mr. W. A. Holman, the Premier

Figure 1: Greta Memorial Cenotaph
Source: Greta Historical Museum.



⁴ ‘Greta News’, *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, 14 April 1916, p. 6.

⁵ ‘Greta News’, *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, 24 April 1916, p. 8.

of New South Wales to be present. Unfortunately, Holman was unavailable to unveil the memorial and one of his colleagues, Mr. D. R. Hall, the Attorney General of NSW carried out the duty.⁶ This was the first fully formed war memorial in the Hunter Valley.

The design and erection of the Greta Memorial Cenotaph was carried out three years before the NSW State Government published guidelines for the erection of community war memorials.

The crossed rifles and raised crown are a dominant feature of both the Greta Memorial Cenotaph and the gold medal presented to the Greta soldiers. Similarly, the words 'They Answered Their Country's Call' and the slight variation, 'He Answered His Country's Call,' are the prominent wording on the cenotaph, the gold medal and also on the 'Honour the Brave' certificate presented to returned servicemen during March 1919 by the Greta Council.

Medal Prize

The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate on 20 May 1916 reported that,

At a war service committee meeting at the council chambers on Tuesday evening the secretary stated that 102 engraved gold medals had been procured at a cost of £33/11s. Two more medals were ordered to be procured for two more recruits who are expected to be on final leave shortly. As more than 220 persons⁷ have enlisted from Greta more than 100 medals will have to be procured.

Based on the above statement the individual medals were valued at six shillings seven pence each. A private soldier's wage at the time was five shillings per day and a pint of beer was three pence.

Surviving Medals

At least four 'gold medals' are known to exist. These are the medals presented to:

Private Charles Smith;
Private Andrew Shaw;
Private Walter Morris; and
Private Richard Lewis.

6 'Greta's Red-Letter Day', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 3 July 1916, p. 4.

7 There are 186 Great War names listed on the Greta Memorial Cenotaph.



Figures 2-4: Crossed rifles and raised crown. Source: Author.

Charles Smith

Charles Thomas Pickering Smith was attested at Warwick Farm on 13 September 1915 as a member of the 2nd Infantry Battalion, AIF. Smith had worked as a miner and labourer and was living in Darlinghurst when he enlisted. His employment was as a barman.

Smith's parents were living in Greta in 1916 and he visited them on his final leave. *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* of 18 January 1916 records that

A send-off was tendered on Friday evening to Private C. Smith, and Signaller W. Hatcher, who were on final leave. The function took place in the Central Hall, and in the absence of the Mayor, Mr. H. J. Thomas presided. Private Smith was presented on behalf of the citizens with an inscribed gold medal

and with a Balaclava cap, on behalf of Miss W. Pryor. ... Both recipients responded. Owing to the short notice given of the meeting, the attendance was not so large as it would have been otherwise.

Smith embarked at Sydney with the 2nd Battalion heading for the Middle-East. On arrival at Ferry Post Camp, Egypt, Smith transferred to 'A' Company of the 54th Infantry Battalion. The 54th Battalion embarked on HMT *Caledonian* at Alexandria arriving at Marseilles, France on 19 June 1916. The battalion then travelled by train to Hazelbrouck and entered the trenches for the first time on the 11 July 1916. The battalion was rotated in and out of the trenches and at 1750 hours on 19 July 1916 the 54th Battalion commenced an attack on the opposing German trenches. This became one element in what was to become known as the Battle of Fromelles.

Smith was killed in action on either 19 or 20 July 1916 and was buried in the Rue Petillon Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, France.⁸



Figure 5: Private Charles Smith – Gold Medal. Source: Author.

Andrew Shaw

Andrew Frederick Shaw enlisted at East Maitland on 11 December 1915 and joined the 35th Infantry Battalion. Shaw was a married man, a miner, and 31 years of age at enlistment. *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* of 25 April 1916 reported that Shaw, amongst others, was given a farewell during which 'Each of the guests was presented by the Mayor, Alderman C. Beswick, on behalf of the citizens, with an engraved gold medal'. On 1 May 1916, the 35th Battalion embarked for England arriving on 9 July 1916. Shaw transferred to the 56th Battalion and on

⁸ War service records, NAA, B2455.

24 September 1916 sailed for France. Soon after arriving in France, Shaw was attached to the 14th Infantry Brigade Mining Company. He served with the mining company until 18 March 1918 when he was detached for duty at the divisional baths at Abbeville, France as a batman. The following month he was moved to the laundry for duty.

On 2 June 1919, Private Shaw embarked on HMAT *Beltana* for Australia, disembarking in Sydney on 19 July 1919. He was discharged from the AIF at 2nd Military District Headquarters on 4 September 1919 and was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.⁹

Walter Morris



Figure 6: Private Andrew Shaw – Gold Medal. Source: Author.

Frederick Walter Morris enlisted at Newcastle on 26 August 1915 and formed part of the 14th reinforcements of the 3rd Infantry Battalion. He was a single man, a hairdresser, 24 years and ten months of age at enlistment. *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* on 12 May 1916 reported Morris's farewell.

Six members of the Miners' Corps, viz., Sappers J. C. Brittle, D. N. Ronaldson, W. V. Coleman, J. Sumner, W. Morris, and G. A. Schneider, from the Central

⁹ War service records, NAA, B2455.

Greta mine, were entertained at the Central Hall on Wednesday evening, and made the recipients of suitable mementoes from the citizens' committee, Central Greta Miners' Lodge, and the Girls' Patriotic League.

Morris joined the 3rd Battalion in the field on 8 June 1916. Wounded in action the following month, he re-joined his battalion on 14 September, and on 4 November 1916, he contorted his back which required his evacuation to England for treatment. Morris returned to the 3rd Battalion in France on 11 April 1917.

A common affliction of soldiers was pyrexia, or fever of unknown origin, and Morris was struck down during January 1918. Initially treated in France, Morris was invalided to England to recover and he remained there until being repatriated to Australia during September 1919. Morris discharged from the AIF on 27 January 1920.¹⁰

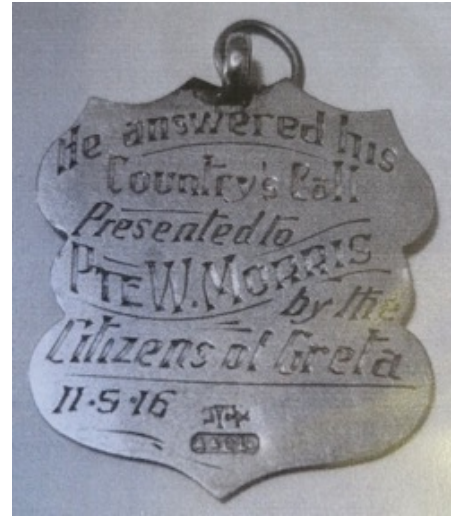


Figure 7: Private Walter Morris – Gold Medal. Source: Greta Historical Museum.

Richard Lewis

Joseph Richard Lewis was attested at Liverpool after enlisting on 16 February 1915. Richard Lewis was a single man, 19 years and 11 months of age, the son of the Greta mayor at the time, Mr. J. A. Lewis. Lewis undertook his initial military training at Liverpool and on 30 March 1915, he was allocated to 'C' Company of the 18th Infantry Battalion. The 18th Battalion embarked at Sydney on-board HMAT *Ceramic* bound for the Middle-East. The battalion landed at Gallipoli at dawn on the morning of 22 August 1915 without incident and took up position in Reserve Gully near Watson's Pier. At some time on the same day, Lewis received a gunshot wound to the hip. Initially treated by the 16th Casualty Clearance Station, he was evacuated to Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos before being transported to Malta. During late March 1916, Lewis was transferred to the 3rd General Hospital at Abbassia near Cairo, Egypt. Lewis remained there until boarding the hospital ship *Karoola* on 12 April 1916 to return to Australia. Lewis was medically discharged from the AIF on 5 January 1917 with a pension of £3 per fortnight.¹¹

¹⁰ War service records, NAA, B2455.

¹¹ War service records, NAA, B2455.



Figure 8: Private Richard Lewis – Gold Medal. Source: Author.

Medal Comparison

A comparison of the four gold medals indicates that each of the medals is subtly different as illustrated by the following four photographs.

The two medals on the left (above) appear identical but differ significantly to the two different medals to the right. Note the suspension ring on the third medal is parallel



Figure 9: Front views of gold medals. Source: Author.

with the face of the medal where at the remainder the suspension ring is at right angles to the face of the medal. The background engraving details differ as does the engraving detail of the rifles.

The Greta Council was demonstratively supportive of both the war effort and the men from the local area who enlisted for King and Country. The gold medal presented to local enlistees, the war memorial erected in 1916 with a light on top which shone down on the names of the local men who were defending the Empire

in Europe and the Middle East, and the personalised certificate, ‘Honouring the Brave,’ all demonstrated the support of the local community focused through the Greta Council of the day.



Figure 10: Obverse views of gold medals. Source: Author.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge and thank Mrs. Neridah Kentwell, curator of Greta Historical Museum, for her assistance in preparation of this article, along with the descendant families of the original recipients of the Greta gold medal, for access to their family treasures. Thank you.



Figure 11: ‘Honour the Brave’ Certificate. Source: Greta Historical Museum.

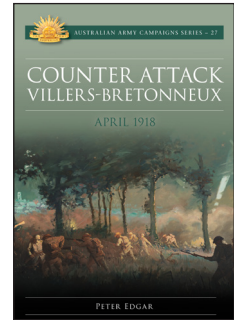
Reviews

Counter Attack: Villers-Bretonneux

Peter Edgar

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2020

Paperback \$19.99



This is one of those glossy Australian Army Campaigns Series (number 27), that are light enough to put in your suitcase and take with you on your pilgrimage to the Western Front. The maps are terrific. We are most familiar with crossing the Roman Road near Marcelcave to Hamel. Thank you, cartographer, for drawing nice new maps and not using copies of copies.

The leading players have a photo and suitable thumbnail biography. A picture is worth a thousand words. I'll bet Major General Sir William Heneker, KCB KCMG DSO with his chook feathers hat and, as my father would say, 'more braid than an Ansett junior clerk' didn't go to your local state school.

The weaponry is explained for those of us who have heard the names but have no idea of their killing capacity. But I did know that the Luger was among the most valued souvenirs of the Allied soldier.

There are tabulations of divisions and who was in charge, and a chart of Order of Battle for 24 April 1918, and a day-to-day description of the conflict. That should settle some arguments that claim only the Australians were there.

Peter Edgar puts his personal spin on the history of the war by explaining that Belgium and France were fighting for the very integrity of their nations. I seem to recall that 'poor little Belgium' was the catch cry that got us into this slaughter. whose record of atrocities in the Congo made the nasty Hun look like amateurs. However, he who pays the piper calls the tune, so the book puts a favourable spin on Haig's shortcomings. 'Every battle had a plan', said Haig. Unfortunately the plan included orders that men advance across no man's land in full pack, dressing from left to right and walk towards German positions bristling with machine guns.

Haig's consideration that there were four phases to wars is more appropriate to a rugby match than modern warfare. No doubt he thought it all out one night in his nice warm, dry bed with clean sheets. Our author said two words should be banned from World War 1 discussions: 'attrition' and 'stalemate'. Another verboten word is 'corpse'. I don't know why because there were so many of them. Histories about generals never say 'next day the xxth division picked up all the corpses and body parts'. Only memoirs by the soldiers mentions this inevitable by-product of the 'cunning plan'.

Is there a mature person among us who has not looked back on their life

and cringed at a decision made in one's earlier years? I find it amazing that 100 plus years after this battle that the author editorialises and finds no criticism of Haig.

Edgar appears to use the John Wayne movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* as an allegory to justify the war and explain the reasons we were fighting. I subscribe to the adage that comedy = tragedy + time. Personally, I found Captain Blackadder's explanation of the war far more accurate.

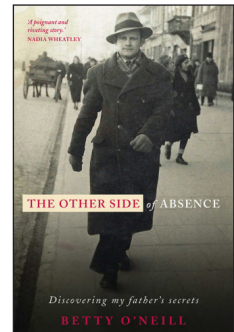
Gail Gunn

The Other Side of Absence: Discovering my father's secrets

Betty O'Neill

Impact Press, Sydney, 2020

Paperback, \$32.99



The premise of Betty O'Neill's book, to inquire, research and discover a World War Two father's secrets, is one that readers of history have become familiar with recently. O'Neill's challenge in this debut memoir is familiar to those of us who set out to research and write about our relatives and those around them.

One might begin the early pages of the book, as I did, fascinated but concerned to find stories too familiar, with themes already over-worked, and a narrative that drips with adulation and heroism. Like me, she completed a degree in history decades before her search began; her history interest later in life was reignited by a wartime father; she grappled with her aim to be a 'dispassionate historian' and like me, Betty tussled with being an Australia-born baby-boomer wide-eyed and naïve stepping over old thresholds in Europe we had read little about in our studies.

O'Neill knew little of her Polish-born father, and his complicated life. He abandoned her and her mother when Betty was very young. She would meet him again when she was a young woman, but this reunion and its aftermath left sinister undertones.

O'Neill completed a PhD through her research. The discipline of this study is reflected in the rigour of the writing, which is at once compelling and simplified, as if she keeps gasping for breath with fear and delight to tell us the next thing that was discovered and how it felt for her. She is equipped to write about her own complex, confused and confronting memories of a father, and what else she had uncovered. A minor criticism of the book was the need to keep the reader clear on who's who in the many people she met. For Betty, this is the case for her many Polish contacts and relatives whom she had not previously known about. Perhaps it was me as reader, absorbed in the undercurrents, losing sight of the people. It did not

matter. As if written for compelling fiction, she inherits an apartment in Poland; she grapples with its keys, locks, ghosts and family documents revealing glimpses of her father's over-faceted life, of its damage and darkness. She meets prying neighbours who take their time then burst in to declare their knowledge of his other family, of secret money and gold. She reads letters that say her father 'showed no kindness to others'.

Resistance too, she finds, has many tailors. Her father, the Polish Resistance fighter, survivor of concentration camps, an exile in post-war England, and a migrant to Australia who did not, could not, stay. O'Neill shows the benefits of tenacity when seeking, and demanding, access to sites and institutional records – and of patient effective translators – even though this may bring surprises that unravel and rattle our preconceptions and assumptions.

O'Neill could have got very lost in her story telling as its layers intertwined and tangled. But for her own reckoning of her father's war, she keeps the tale well-written and compelling. It is a deepening of historical context to the Australian and Polish individuals who still feel what she calls 'the long tail of war'. Readers, we are very familiar with stories of families inheriting damage from war. We must not tire from these themes. O'Neill's work brings us familiar but unique narratives with which we must not tire.

Katrina Kittel

South Africa to Afghanistan: Lifting the Curtain

Bill Edgar

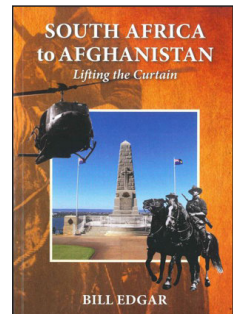
Tammar Publications, Doubleview, 2019

Paperback, \$32.00

The chance encounter with a World War One veteran gave Bill Edgar the inspiration to write *South Africa to Afghanistan: Lifting the Curtain*. That meeting was the impetus for him to audio record the personal stories of Australian veterans from the three services.

Those stories were then used as primary source material for the students in his history classes and much later crafted into the present publication.

Edgar stated that his purpose in writing his book was to present the unvarnished realities of war that were experienced by the men involved in those conflicts and also to record how their experiences differed markedly from how those events were eventually presented in Australian popular culture. The book was written using as the primary sources the personal accounts of the combatants, not the official secondary or sanitised versions. That is the reason why he chose the book's sub title as – 'Lifting the Curtain'.



For example, Trooper Roy 'Rocca' Caporn of the 10th Light Horse Regiment witnessed the failure of four dismounted charges against the Turkish trenches (The Nek) at Gallipoli on the morning of 7 August 1915. He was detailed to join the fifth assault when the action was called off. Having survived the Gallipoli campaign he was invalidated back to Australia in March 1917. His experiences were strongly expressed in one word and he was unashamedly explicit in his vernacular description of the place where he fought. There was no myth of Gallipoli for Caporn.

I enjoyed reading *South Africa to Afghanistan: Lifting the Curtain*. Edgar chose well in selecting a cross section of veterans to show the motivation and experiences of those who by design or circumstances found themselves in danger. There are 14 individual stories from 1900 to 2009. Each could be considered as a short story allowing the reader to pick and choose at their leisure. Photos are generally of good quality and give a touch of realism to the text. The 183 footnotes would be useful for further research. However, there is no index and stories by Australian servicewomen would be a welcome addition.

To the general reader the book offers an introduction to major conflicts involving Australia and a window into the very personal responses and memories recalled by those who were there. Students of military history may also appreciate the candour shown by the veterans as they recall their experiences.

Richard Farrar

Tarra: The Story of an Army Small Ship

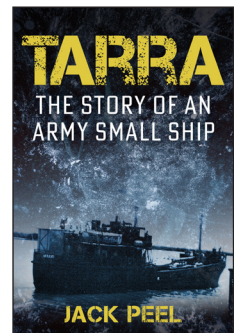
Jack Peel

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2021

Paperback, \$29.99

Small craft made an immense contribution to the delivery of supplies to Allied forces operating in and around New Guinea during the Second World War. Many of these were operated by the Australian Army. One such example is *Tarra*, built in Tasmania and commissioned in 1945. The story of *Tarra* is varied and interesting. From the dumping of excess munitions into the sea, working for the Graves Registration Unit and the Pacific Islands Regiment, and as a training vessel, this small craft's career reflects the activities of the Royal Australian Corps of Transport.

Detailed and thoroughly researched *Tarra* suffers from some poor editing. For instance, Minister for the Army and later Prime Minister, Frank Forde, is misspelled; footnote markers need to be on the outside of full stops; the lack of bibliography is not offset by accurate referencing in footnotes. However, this should not deter any



reader who is interested in expanding their knowledge of under-represented aspects of Australian military history.

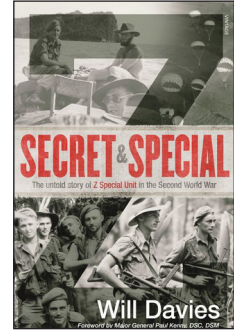
Justin Chadwick

Secret and Special: The Untold Story of Z Special Unit in the Second World War

Will Davies

Vintage Books Australia, Sydney, 2021

Paperback, \$34.99



Z Special Unit was formed in June 1942 as a ‘hold-all’ unit for the agents and operatives employed by the Inter-Allied Services Department, which would itself become part of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB). With the formation of Special Operations Australia (SOA), Z Special Unit was transferred to that organisation while the AIB formed its own M Special Unit to fill the gap. SOA eventually became known as the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) for the remainder of the war. *Secret and Special* outlines all of this in one of its chapters, but not before forty-odd pages of such generalised background information that a reader might be forgiven for thinking the author had temporarily lost the plot.

Indeed, the book casts a wide net over its subject matter, so that it turns out to be not so much a unit history of Z Special, as a broad summary of ‘behind-the-lines’ operations undertaken by Australia generally. Thus it includes yet another retelling of Operation Jaywick – the raid on Singapore harbour by the Krait – and another version of the fighting on Timor by Sparrow Force and 2/2nd Independent Company. The claims regarding the story being ‘untold’ lie, I suppose, in the book’s use of the considerable amount of material in the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to open up other World War Two clandestine operations to a wider readership. So we are presented with chapters on, for example, the disastrous Lagarto forays into Timor, the Insect and Fish operations in Papua New Guinea, the ill-fated Copper operation, and other undertakings throughout the islands to the north of Australia. These are told in a lively and readable style, and are supported by a good selection of maps of the region.

A curious omission is the absence of a proper reference list or bibliography, which is all the more odd since there are endnotes supplied for each chapter. Unfortunately, the uneven and sometimes ambiguous ways sources are cited in the endnotes mean that a bit of work is required on the part of the interested reader/researcher to track them down. This is particularly the case with a much-employed work titled ‘The Official History of Special Operations Australia’. Readers need to

be made aware that this is not a published source, as with the better-known official histories of both world wars, but a confidential, in-house account produced by the SRD in 1946 for very limited distribution. It and other relevant material are now easily accessed from the NAA's website. So while *Secret and Special* should appeal to the general reader, those already familiar with Australia's special operations will find the original sources far more informative and rewarding.

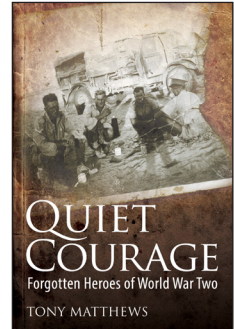
Paul Skrebels

Quiet Courage: Forgotten heroes of World War Two

Tony Matthews

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2021

Paperback, \$29.99



Tony Matthews has written a credible story of many individuals who in their own way have reached the heights of heroism. Many of the individuals are generally forgotten by the general public. I found their stories fascinating as the author details the circumstances these individuals found themselves in the midst of a war. Some of the individuals I have known previously, but others are new to me and so I was interested to read their stories. The book is divided into nine chapters and each chapter details the story of those quiet achievers. Matthews has obviously researched at length the details of those whose story is told.

The story of second pilot James Ward serves as an example. His plane damaged from enemy fire that ignited an engine, Ward volunteered to go out into the wing and extinguish the fire. With the fire out the aircraft managed to limp home and safely land. For his heroism Ward was awarded the Victoria Cross. I mean who does this sought of thing? He was considered a quiet achiever.

Several Australia nurses are the focus of one chapter. After escaping from Singapore when their ship was attacked by the Japanese, the crew and passengers had to evacuate and found themselves in lifeboats. When they came ashore they were met by Japanese soldiers who shot them at the shore line. Only a few escaped this atrocity. This story illustrates the resolve by those who survived and after the war were able to tell the story. This chapter is also confronting but needed to be told. We should always remember the quiet heroes.

The chapter on the Cowra breakout is well detailed and is perhaps a forgotten page in our military history. The Australian guards in charge of the compounds were generally older men who had not met the standards required by the military authorities by were able to act as guards. At the height of the Japanese breakout the quick thinking of some of the guards know doubt saved many of the guards' lives. The author also details the investigations after the event. I knew that there was a

break-out at Cowra, but on reading Matthews's story I was further informed of the details.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the stories of quiet achievers and how they coped with circumstances they would not ordinarily have been placed under. The book is easy to read and flows well from story to story. I found I was able to read the book in only several days as each story was interesting and informative. All in all, a good read.

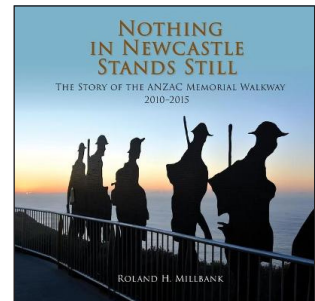
Michael English

Nothing in Newcastle Stands Still: The Story of the ANZAC Memorial Walkway 2010-2015

Roland H Millbank

Echo Books, West Geelong, 2021

Paperback, \$24.95



Opened on 24 April 2015, Newcastle's ANZAC Memorial Walkway celebrated the landings at Gallipoli and BHP's Newcastle steelworks. Both events were to have long-lasting impacts on the residents of Newcastle and its environs. Roland Millbank documents the people, the politics and funding of a significant memorial improvement.

Memorials can be very contentious. Millbank explores the problems faced by the planning and construction, as well as the criticism afterwards. He explores the problems encountered in the planning and design of the project as well as the input of the main drivers of the memorial.

A full-colour production, *Nothing in Newcastle Stands Still*, is a fitting tribute to those who worked to achieve a significant memorial.

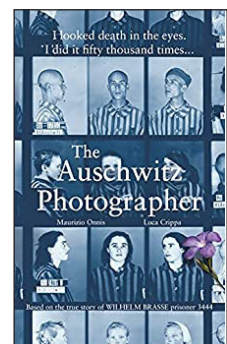
Justin Chadwick

The Auschwitz Photographer: Based on the true story of Wilhelm Brasse

Maurizio Onnis and Luca Crippa

Doubleday, Sydney, 2021

Paperback, \$35.00



This book came about when an Italian publisher was looking for a previously untold story about concentration camps. Along came a little gem of a story about a man, Wilhelm Brasse. We know right from the start that Brasse survived because the book largely draws

on a 2005 Polish television interview.

All the required ingredients for a book about Auschwitz are here, with some surprises. There was a brothel in Auschwitz! The mind boggles. Who were the clients and who were the staff? Did the ladies have the same choice in the matter as 'comfort women' in Asia, where they deported ladies making a short stop between the transports and the gas chamber? Were they Aryan maidens doing their bit for Hitler and the Master Race SS? There is practically nothing evil you could invent about Auschwitz. But some of the stories did not ring true.

The book in its presentation as a novel brings up the conundrum: what stories are true and what are padding? The truth of Auschwitz atrocities are so bad it does not need padding, but if some of the stories are made up, it casts doubt on the true stories. Is there extant a film taken inside a gas chamber showing the Zyklon B being thrown in, the doors locked and the humans dying horribly? A little poetic license diminishes the gravity of the obscenity of the gas chambers.

I find history being presented as a novel, with imagined conversations and emotions and thoughts being attributed to a character which are totally unproveable, dumbs down history. There are long passages of conversations in this book, followed by large chunks of intelligent narrative and then we are back to the imagined conversations. We discussed this method of presenting history at a (MHSA) Society meeting recently and most members said they preferred their history presented without frills. However, one opinion was that if you read a history book presented as a novel and it tweaks your curiosity and you go searching for more in-depth knowledge, the book has served a good purpose.

There were stories that had me so tense because I feared what would happen, and it did. Like the man with the Garden of Eden tattoo on his back. Tales of German kindness amid the carnage. The man who was allowed to bring his parents and baby son to Auschwitz for one day so he could marry the mother. However, I had doubts about the story of a counterfeiting operation making American \$1 notes in Auschwitz. My interest was tweaked so I investigated further. The big counterfeiting operation was at Sachsenhausen.

Brasse worked for Mengele, taking obscene photos of obscene medical practices on pre-pubescent twin girls that had no scientific worth at all. He developed the photos taken of transports arriving and the sorting process. Why were the Nazis so keen to document their awfulness? Terrible tales of making up little photo albums as a souvenir for visiting Nazi leaders. Curiously, Himmler doesn't get a mention.

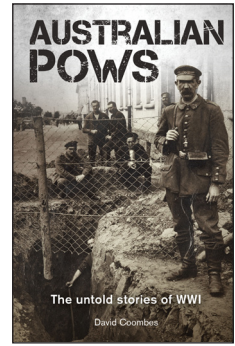
The book sort of fizzled out. Brasse was ordered to destroy all the photographic evidence, but he didn't. The Russians arrived. I was in a panic that in their quest for revenge the Russians would set fire to the hut containing all the negatives and prints, but the book had left Auschwitz by then and I never found out.

Australian POWs: The untold stories of WW1

David Combes

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2021

Paperback, \$29.99



Over the years I have read many books on the exploits of the AIF detailing their service at Gallipoli and the Western Front. But it is very rare that I have come across a book of those unfortunate men who were captured by the enemy and were imprisoned for several years or more. Did they feel a sense of guilt in that they may have let their mates down or it was something that they would not let others know of their experiences? David Combes explains in detail that it was perhaps poor leadership and tactics by the senior officers who were at fault and not the men who were captured. Combes has researched records and interviews conducted by David Chalk and produced a readable and credible book on the experiences of these men.

The book has thirteen chapters beginning with the background to WW1 and ending with peace in 1918. He also devotes a chapter to those men who served on Gallipoli and their experiences with the Turks. Sadly, many did not survive the harsh treatment. Approximately 200 men were taken prisoner with approximately 3,850 taken by the Germans on the Western Front. The author takes the reader from the time the Australians first served on the Western Front until the end of the war. And also after the war when Australian prisoners came home with stories of what happened to them and how the experiences affected them.

Combes writes in great detail of the experiences of those soldiers who became prisoners after the battles of Fromelles and Bullecourt. They experienced harsh treatment at the hands of some brutal guards but, with their mates supporting them, many survived to return to Australia. Some did try to escape, but in the main were generally unsuccessful. The care packages from Australia and Britain provided by various agencies supported the men ensuring that they survived in times of food shortages. Combes writes with an engaging style, making reading a serious subject easy. *Australian POWs* is a fine tribute to those men who through sheer will power and good humour survived their ordeal. This is a story that had to be told and Combes has done just that with this excellent and readable book.

Michael English

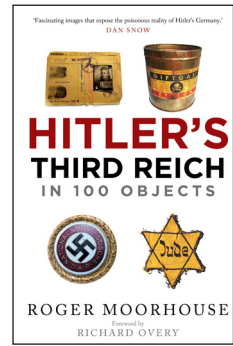
Hitler's Third Reich in 100 Objects

Roger Moorhouse

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2021

Paperback, \$34.99

When Neil McGregor, Director of the British Museum, presented a series of radio programs that explored the world's history through 100 objects from the museum on BBC Radio 4 little did he know of the myriad of copies that would be produced. The format, selecting objects that typify an era, is an excellent approach to understanding events through objects. It is like being in an armchair museum. But rather than the objects being described on radio, many books that have used the format have been published. One such is Roger Moorhouse's *Hitler's Third Reich in 100 Objects*. In it Moorhouse uses a range of interesting objects to expand the readers understanding of the Third Reich. Objects range from the military, such as weaponry, to the domestic, such as ration cards. From the political, like Nazi Party badges, to the frightening, like a bed from a psychiatric asylum. The writing is just the right amount and the objects speak volumes. This is a worthy addition to the genre. Also, who doesn't want to see Rudolph Hess's underpants?

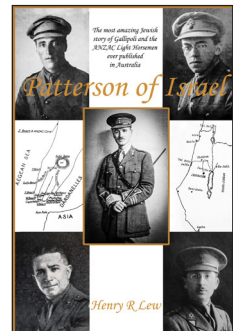
**Justin Chadwick***Patterson of Israel*

Henry Lew

Self-published, www.henryrlew.com.au/books/

Paperback, \$29.99

This is the story of John Henry Patterson, a very interesting man, an Irish Protestant. Two biographies have been already written, one in 2004 and another in 2008, but Henry Lew thought them not Jewish enough so he has written a third. So, having nailed his colours to the mast, you cannot claim you have been misled by our author.



Apparently Lawrence of Arabia got all the best press coverage. Well, we sort of know that. Like Simpson and his Donkey. It is too late now to get the actual facts to replace the myths. Our author rubbishes the movie Lawrence of Arabia. Pity because it is one of my favourite movies. He reserves special criticism for Lawrence being 'ostentatious' by wearing a keffiyeh. Having worn a keffiyeh myself, I consider it one of the most sensible garments ever devised. On a yacht in a stiff breeze, it doesn't blow off when you go about. Trust me.

If they make a movie about Patterson it is he who should be played by Peter O'Toole, because both are tall and lean. I have seen a two-minute footage of

Lawrence in full drag at the Imperial War Museum, and he should have been played by Ronnie Corbett.

I bring up what actor should play Patterson because in his early life he was the darling of the syphilitic, wife swapping, big game hunting set in southern Africa, as seen in *Out of Africa*. He went on a safari with a wife and husband, the husband got a bullet in the head and Patterson and the wife buried the husband and continued on the safari in just the one tent. As you would.

The Great War found him in Egypt in command of a rag tag of Jewish men that he turned into soldiers, who it seems, acquitted themselves well. There is a lovely story about a commanding officer calling one of the men a 'dirty little Jew' and Patterson ordered the men to fix bayonets and form a square around the offending (offensive?) officer. I do hope this story is not apocryphal.

There were several instances of Patterson's Jewish troops being discriminated against and he, to his enormous credit, always went into bat for them. He never rose in the ranks of the British Army and this is attributed to anti-Semitism, not to the incident of the husband on safari with the bullet in his head.

Lew is very quick to brand anybody anti-Semitic if they don't support Zionism 100%.

Like other minorities in the Great War, these Jewish soldiers volunteered in the hope that they would be taken seriously, and get a greater say in the future of Israel. I believe Indian troops joined on the understanding that they be listened to when they spoke of independence after the war. Aboriginal Australian men joined up to get respect and the vote and West Indian men the same. This was a common aim.

There came the time when it was proposed that the Jewish Regiment join up with the West Indian regiment. Patterson to the rescue and this idea was dropped. If I suggested that refusing to join up with West Indians was a teensy weensy bit racist, would I be labelled anti-Semitic?

What's in a name? Apparently, Bedouins are 'thieving Bedouins' who 'flocked all around like Locusts, looting machine-guns, rifles, ammunition, and stores of every kind left abandoned by the Turks'. However, the British 'captured' '11,000 prisoners, 60 guns, 150 machine-guns, hundreds of tons of ammunition, millions of rounds of small arms ammunition, large quantities of railway rolling-stock, foodstuffs, horses, mules, transport wagons, motor lorries, you name it; as brilliant a piece of work as done in this or any other theatre of war'. Makes the Bedouins look like mere amateurs really.

Most of this book is lifted from Patterson's own writing. He writes easily, a nice narrative without ever feeling the urge to talk about the nice sunset. He is more than aware, as were Australian Light Horse troops, that they were fighting over Biblical ground.

Patterson, and our author, believed that the British High Command in Palestine were anti-Semitic and enthusiastically against the Balfour Declaration. The book bogs down into the pettiness of the British High Command. It always mystifies me that one of the great insults of the world is to accuse someone of 'carrying on like

a bunch of old women'. My God, the petty rivalries, the pure bloody-mindedness, pulling rank and hiding behind the old boys' network in the British Army put old ladies to shame. And little old ladies don't risk the lives of thousands of troops.

Patterson died in the USA and many years later was buried in Israel.

Lew then has a 64-page epilogue that explains anti-Semitism in the 21st Century. It is decidedly anti-Islam. He reminds me of the educational chats I used to get from my Jewish dentist. May I bring up a small point of history? No Moslem drove the trains to Auschwitz and not one Moslem fingerprint was ever on a can of Zyklon-B.

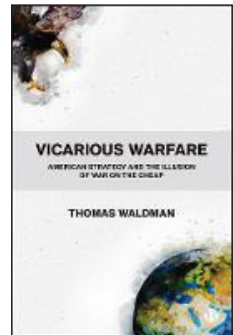
Gail Gunn

Vicarious Warfare: American Strategy and the Illusion of War on the Cheap

Thomas Waldman

Bristol University Press, Bristol

Hardback, \$44.99



International military involvement by the US has changed radically during the years after the conclusion of the Second World War. Policy makers and senior soldiers have faced an altered strategic landscape, particularly since the advent of the War on Terror. The application of military force by the US, according to Thomas Waldman in his fascinating work *Vicarious Warfare: American Strategy and the Illusion of War on the Cheap*, has moved to a vicarious form. In this, Waldman argues convincingly, the US has increasingly adopted warfare through proxies, reducing exposure to high casualties from conventional war methods through increased use of special forces and covert instruments. Waldman explores the historical use of vicarious warfare both globally and specifically by the US before the current development as a central feature of American wars. His argument is clear and the thesis is developed thoroughly and convincingly.

The timing of the publication of *Vicarious Warfare* is apt, as Waldman questions some of the reliance of policymakers on vicarious war methodology and the future of US warfighting. The announcement of the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan post-dates the publication of the book and will serve as a test of Waldman's hypothesis. This, though, will not reduce the importance of this book and Waldman's argument. An important addition to current strategic and policy decision making that has flow-on effects to Australia through our alliance partnership.

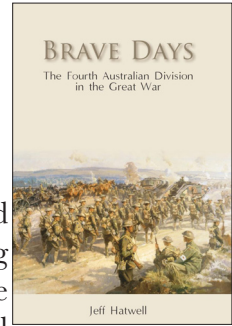
Justin Chadwick

Brave Days: The Fourth Australian Division in the Great War

Jeff Hartwell

Echo Books, Melbourne

Hardback, \$60.45



Australian military historiography is filled with the actions and events up to and including battalions. Rarely does the writing take a wider scope and view conflict through the lens of large formations, such as divisions or corps. Fortunately Jeff Hartwell has taken on such a task in *Brave Days: The Fourth Australian Division in the Great War*.

From its formation in Egypt through its prolonged fighting on the Western Front, Hartwell has written a detailed narrative of events and battles that the division was involved. He draws from primary and secondary sources to construct a well-written and informative book. This is admirable work. The scale is enormous, and it is a credit to Hartwell's persistence to complete such a project.

Brave Days is a valuable addition to First World War narrative histories and should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in Australia's involvement in that conflict.

Justin Chadwick

Technology

Kite Balloons in Palestine: A Question

Regular contributor to the Technology section, Rohan Goyne, has sent in this photograph of a British balloon taken during the First World War's Desert Campaign in Palestine (see image page 63). He found the image online but little else. Further investigation using the British order of battle shows two Royal Naval Kite Balloon sections, which, he presumes, were used for battlefield observation and reconnaissance. Can any knowledgeable readers provide an explanation?

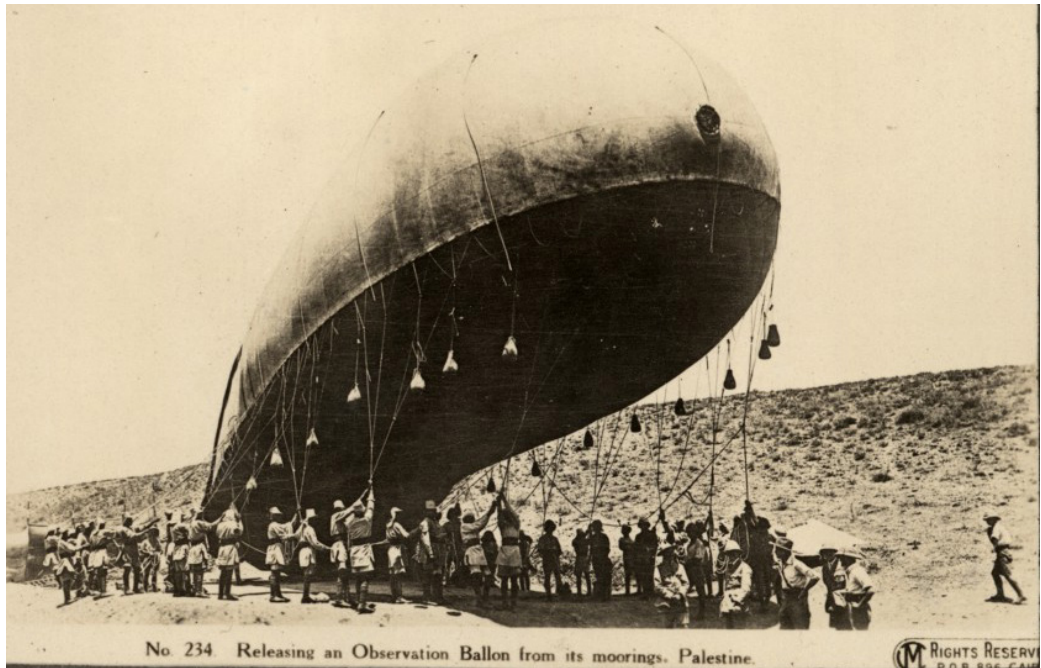


Figure 1: Observation balloon, Palestine. Source: IWM

Society Matters

Delivery of Sabretache

Over recent years, the Federal Council of the MHSA has become concerned over the increasing cost of the production and distribution of the Society's journal, *Sabretache*. In the 21st Century, where electronic transmission of information is normal, it has been decided that *Sabretache* will now be delivered via a digital format for those members who choose. Members will be asked whether they would like to transfer over to delivery of *Sabretache* through their email or continue to receive a physical copy. By accepting *Sabretache* electronically valuable savings will be made by the Society.

Please note: A physical copy will continue to be produced and will continue to be available for these members who prefer *Sabretache* in a hard copy format. There is no intention to cease production of *Sabretache* in its traditional paper format.

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President	Ian Stagoll 165 Belconnen Way Hawker ACT 2614 ian.stagoll@gmail.com 02 6254 0199	2.00pm, last Thursday of the month, Jan to Nov Canberra Southern Cross Club, Jamison
Secretary/Treasurer	James Smith canberrabomber@gmail.com 0414 946 909	

QUEENSLAND

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