

## **Elsie Florance**

**103792 A.C.W. Wilson E.**

The day the article was being reported (see end of story for article), I was not at Pearce Air Base. I was in Hollywood Hospital having my tonsils removed for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

After my basic training at Karrinyup Golf Course (it was taken over for the duration of the War). One other lass (Ruth Davey, married name Triate) and I were posted to Geraldton. We were only there a few weeks when we both sat for an examination. We were accepted to train as instrument repairers. Ruth and I were sent to Perth. There was a base on the Esplanade. We were the first 2 girls to be trained. There were 40 men in the class. Ruth and I had to march over to Perth Tech every day. In the final exam at Perth Tech, I came 3<sup>rd</sup> and Ruth 4<sup>th</sup>. A lot of the men were watch repairers, so they were used to doing the sort of work we had to learn. From Perth we were sent to Sydney and had to attend Ultimo Tech. Our first air base was Boulder Race Course. It was taken over and made into a repair base.

From Boulder I was posted to Cunderdin Air Training Base. The Air Crew used to learn to fly in the Tiger Moth planes. They had to be flying by 3am because it was too hot for them in the middle of the day, too many hot air bumps from the ground. I was moved around to many air bases. The last one was Pearce.

After we worked on a plane we had to go up in it for a test flight. We were given control to fly, but we were not allowed to land or take off. One of my test flights was in a Beaufort, the flight was up north. My trip up north during the War (WWII) left Pearce Air Base, flew to Corunna Downs, then on to Noonkanbah, from Noonkanbah to Broome. The plane was a Beaufort. I had to sit in the bubble of the nose, it was made of plastic so I could see everything as we were flying. I had earphones so the pilot could speak to me. For the trip I was made Sgt. I was not permitted to eat with the airmen.

The pilot had to send a message to say a lady was on board and make sure the men had shorts on. The plane was being tested because it was being sent up to the islands to fight the Japs.

(In the article attached, A.C.W. Sexton F, is Florence Sexton, nee Cowcill).

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When Viv made the hatch-door (see attachment, Henry Florence, page 45), he had his leg in plaster. He was bored with nothing to do, so he went to the workshop and signed out tools, nails, bolts and screws. The fence round the Air Base training school was made of wood (in fact a lot of places in Canada and America have wooden fences, even some jails). The hatch-door was covered by shrub and bush, as the men used it they had to pull a bush behind them to cover over their footprints. It was winter and the ground was covered with snow. The S. P. (Service Police) did eventually find the door and it was sealed off to stop the unofficial leave. Viv's Air Crew No. 441525, pilot passed exams.

My brother-in-law, Ronald Arthur Florance, joined the Navy. He was on the JARRARD when the Japs bombed Darwin Harbour. Ron was wounded and he had to stay in hospital.

Ron married Ann Taylor Geekie and they had 6 children (2 girls and 4 boys). Peter Ronald Florance, my eldest nephew was a Duntroon graduate. He was a Colonel when he retired from the Army.

My son Robert John George Florance joined the Army. He was in Vietnam just a couple of weeks when he and a corporal were talking down a chopper, the Viet Cong came in and shot the corporal. Robert was made a corporal in a few days. Both Peter and my son were in the permanent army. Rob was a Sgt when he retired. He was attached to the Americans Army at The Fire Base (MACE), it was on the border between North and South Vietnam.

Rob and Peter were first cousins. He grew up with Peter. The first time Rob had to go to Peter's office, he walked in and said "How are you Pete", then the army training kicked in. He saluted and said "Sir", it is hard when they are the same family. Rob and Peter were in Vietnam at the same time, Peter was at the Army Base in South Vietnam (Nue Dat). Peter was helping the withdrawal of the troops, it was on the T.V.

The printed pages below are out of the family history book of the Florance family. Peter's wife Sandra researched and printed it 'The Chichester Connection, The Florance Family 1700 – 1977'.

Sandra organised a family reunion when she launched the book. People came from all over Australia, every state, New Zealand and Kangaroo Island. The family are all round the world, America, Canada, Europe, Italy, Normandy in France. The first Florance members went to England with William the Conqueror.

Coralie died soon after her daughter's birth, on 19 March 1917. Her gravestone at Albany Cemetery states:

Williams, Coralie, d. 19.3.1917, 24 year old wife of James, mother of Muriel Edith and Coralie Florance.

The family was split up for a while, with grandmother Mary Florance taking two year old Muriel, and moving to Manjimup, and Grandma Williams looking after baby Coralie until she was 6 years old.

Jim Williams married Amy Warburton in Greenbushes in 1921 and they went to live on a farm at Harvey, near Mt Barker, where they raised four children, Jim, Shirley, Max and Laurie. Muriel lived with them and Coralie went to them when she was 6 years old and her Grandma Williams was dying. It was a traumatic experience for her to be taken away from her grandmother and Uncle Fred Williams who lived with them and the nearby Williams cousins, to go and live with strangers in the middle of the bush at Harvey. Coralie stayed at Harvey till she married.

Muriel Edith Williams married Norm Eastwood and had two sons, Graham and Kenneth. She and Norm divorced and Muriel married Stanley Tanner. They have a daughter Sharon who married Mr. Bell and has a daughter.

Coralie Florance Williams married Alex Sorley, 'the most marvellous man in the world' and they have been happily married for 53 years. They have no family.

## 2. Arthur Benjamin Florance

Arthur Benjamin Florance would have been 15 years old when his parents moved to W.A. He probably helped his father in the orchard at Wicklow Estate. Arthur worked on tugboats on Albany Harbour before joining the AIF in 19.7.1915, breaking in horses for the Light Horse. He was Private No. 1385 and spent the war in the Middle East. He was demobbed in 24.7.1918.

On return to Western Australia he found work in the saw mills and timber industry of the S.W. of the state. Arthur

Florance married Elsie Ada Robinson (b. 25.9.1898) in Greenbushes on 6.6.1920.

They lived for four months at Greenbushes, then moved to Pemberton timbertown, where Arthur worked all his life. They lost a son in 2.11.1922, but a daughter, Elsie Fay Florance was born 8.3.1928 and Gordon Arthur Florance in 3.2.1934. They grew up in Pemberton where Arthur was an engine driver at the timber mill. Arthur died in 14.5.1970 and Elsie in 31.5.1995, in Perth, where they had retired.

Elsie Fay Florance married Peter Waldemar Haas on 15.7.1961 and they had Amanda Fay Haas on 14.11.1965. Peter was born in 15.7.1928 and sadly died on 7.10.1996 after moving to Kalgoorlie to be near his daughter and grandsons.

Amanda married Michael Brian Lovitt in Perth on 2.3.1986 and moved to Kalgoorlie where Michael was a mine manager and is now a Senior Technical Services Engineer for I.C.I. They have three sons:

1. Benjamin Peter James Lovitt, b. 11.6.1991.
2. Christopher William Lovitt, b. 14.1.1993.
3. David Michael Lovitt, b. 22.8.1995.

Gordon Arthur Florance worked in the Administration of the Perth Health Service, now retired, and married Phyllis Seaborn in Perth on 29.5.1959. They had two daughters:

1. Paige Louise Florance, b. 7.3.1970, Perth, W.A.
2. Carrie Shannon Florance, b. 18.2.1976, Perth, W.A.

## + 3. Robert Henry Florance (POB to the family)

Robert Henry Florance (Bob), after leaving Albany (probably during the war), worked in the timber industry, hewing the Jarrah trees for transportation to England to use as paving for the streets and later to build the London underground system. In Greenbushes he worked with the Walton brothers, losing his Methodist principles in the rough timber town. He met and, aged 23 years, married Edith Esther Walton (Edie) (19) on 21 September 1921 at St Barnabus' Church, Greenbushes, W.A. The write-up in the local paper described the crowded church because the 'contracting parties and their parents are well known here':

The bride was prettily dressed in ivory crepe de chine, trimmed with silver beads, veil of tulle, and wore orange blossom and pearls. She carried a lovely bouquet of roses, snowdrops and asparagus fern, decorated with streamers of white ribbon and horseshoes. The bridesmaids (Miss Ethel Walton and Miss Sybil Florance) wore buttercup voile dresses trimmed with silk floss, black hats trimmed with buttercup ribbons. The mother of the bride wore slate crepe de chine trimmed with beads and floss, with hat to match, and the bridegroom's mother wore black silk poplin with hat to match.



Arthur Benjamin Florance

(Left) Arthur B. Florance  
in 10th Light Horse Uniform  
14.11.1919.

UNCLE ARTHUR  
POB'S OLDER BROTHER.



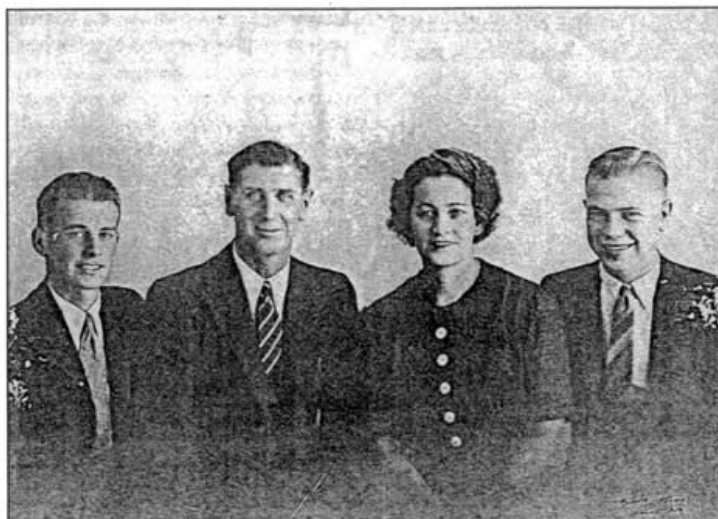
(Left) Robert Henry Florance and Edith Esther Walton on their wedding day 21.9.1921.



Qualifying Certificate for Edith Walton 20.10.1915.  
The Head Teacher was A.J. Florance.

STATE SAW MILLS		A. 15774
REQUISITION No.	Date 27/7/34	
From Manager Mrs. Alice Rose Hall	To Whom it may Concern	
SUBJECT.		
<p>The bearer - Mr. R. Florance has been employed by the State Saw Mills for a period of thirteen years - during that time he has given every satisfaction as to his work - has found him to be very efficient in his duties also cheerful &amp; courteous at all times - he is extremely useful as a handy man &amp; displays plenty of initiative &amp; is personally very happy to do his work - but as he is leaving here to go on accord to take a better position &amp; I am confident that he will be successful in his new position &amp; I am sure that he will be successful in his new position &amp; I am sure that he will be successful in his new position.</p>		
<p>T. H. Champ Manager, Saw Mills</p>		

State Saw Mills Reference for Robert (Bob) Florance 1934.



Robert (Bob) Henry Florance and Edith (nee Walton) Florance with sons Vivian Robert (left) and Ronald Arthur (right), c. 1940.

The happy couple later left for Bunbury by motor car.

Bob and Edie had three sons;

1. Vivian Robert Florance, b. 9 June 1922, m. Elsie Wilson, 20.5.1948 in Perth. *W.A.*
2. Ronald Arthur Florance, b. 12.9.1923, m. 5.12.1942, Ann Taylor Geekie.
3. John Florance, b. d. 30.1.1925. On his death certificate, his father is occupied as a timber hewer.

Bob worked as a sleeper-cutter around the Greenbushes, Dean Mill areas and was a tall strong man with large hands from the axe work. He played football for Greenbushes. In one game against another country team he went up for a mark at the same time as another player, they crashed to the ground, Bob with a broken collar bone. He pulled up his socks and kicked the winning goal, then went to hospital. His collar bone never healed properly.

Robert Henry (Pop) Florance died in the Home of Peace, Thomas Street, Subiaco, Perth on 20 July, 1986, from heart failure. Edie pre-deceased him in Mount Lawley Hospital, on 12 July 1970, after a stroke.

Their eldest son *Vivian Robert Florance* was named after his uncle Viv Walton who had been best-man at their wedding. Viv was born with a tooth in his mouth and learned to fight to protect his name 'Vivian Florance' in a timber town. He passed an entry exam to attend Perth Modern School, in Perth, and the family moved to the city to be with him. Here Bob worked at the State Timber Mill.



*Viv Florance in Light Horse uniform while in Militia.*

Viv finished his schooling at a State school and then before WWII joined the Militia in the 10th Light Horse, then applied for the AIF by putting his age up. Viv was sent back to the Militia, where he did lots of guard duty. When he turned 18, he applied to join the RAAF and was accepted as air-crew.

Viv had been involved in amateur boxing during these years and by 1940 was the Service's Bantam Weight Champion. He used to get leave without pay to attend the fights.

The first knuckle of his finger was taken off in a machine accident before he joined the AIF and when he was called up for the RAAF, they wouldn't accept him until the finger was healed, so he stayed in the Army a while longer.

The Armoured Corps boxing championships were held in Perth in 1943 and Viv had gone through to the finals. It was rumoured that General Robertson ('Red Robbie') had told his CO that if Viv won the championship he would approve his transfer to the Air Force. Even though he was suffering from injuries, he won the championship, and from there got into the RAAF. He was sent eventually to Edmonton in



*Vivian Robert Florance: Services Bantam-weight Champion 1940.*

Canada for training, where there were thousands of trainee pilots on standby to go to Europe and the Middle East. Viv is renowned for making a hatchdoor in the back fence of the compound for 'unofficial leave'.

The war ended before training finished, and Viv travelled through the USA, visiting Hollywood, Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, before coming back to Perth.

While in Canada, Viv had several boxing bouts, one with the well-known American black professional, 'Honey Waithe' – Viv won on points after a tough contest. He won 27 cups and trophies for his prowess in the ring.



*Viv Florance centre back, in Canada.*

Back in civvy street, Viv worked for Bairds, a local hardware store in Perth. He later travelled selling automotive parts, then entered the wine industry as a salesman and, in 1969, was made Sales Manager of Valencia, retiring in 1979 after a heart attack.

He married Elsie Wilson in 1948. Elsie (b. 22.7.1924) had known Viv since she was 15 and met him again after the war. She had joined the Women's Air Force and was trained as an instrument repairer. 103792 A.C.W. Wilson was sent to Ultimo Technical School in Sydney and from there to Cunderdin Flying Training School, W.A. where she went up in aircraft on test flights. She was moved around the various air bases in W.A., testing different types of planes, until the end of the war when she was discharged in 1946.

When Elsie and Viv were divorced in 1979, they had two children:



*Viv in AIF uniform with father Bob and dog Sandy.*

# WOMAN'S REALM.

## WORK OF THE W.A.A.F.

### Trucks and Plane Instruments.

Among members of the WAAAF serving at Pearce RAAF station many are tackling unusual jobs. For instance, ACW N. A. Diss, an equipment assistant, deals with some 230-odd motor vehicles, while ACW's F. M. Sexton and E. Wilson spend their days checking, testing and repairing aircraft instruments.

A reporter found ACW Diss at work among about 200 very large motor vehicles, the equipment for which she is responsible, parked at the transport pool. These ranged from petrol waggons to trucks and ambulances, and included utility trucks, motor cycles and jeeps.

ACW Diss was a neat, business-like figure in the blue working jeans of the service, a beret hiding her dark hair. Although operating from the stores section of the station, she explained that she visited her charges at least twice a day to check them over and see that nothing was missing. Back at headquarters she interpreted figures on the huge black-board from which she told at a glance just where each vehicle was and its condition. For instance, the first seven columns represented vehicles parked at the pool, the next those expected at the pool, and another the vehicles undergoing repairs at the workshops and so on. Different coloured chalks were used to indicate the serviceableness or otherwise of the vehicles—white for those ready to take the road, browns for "write-offs," red for "G" (or major inspection), and green for repairs. A smaller board dealt in a similar manner with each engine.

### Service Romance.

ACW Diss joined the WAAAF three years ago as a stores hand—and as Miss Mary King, of Manjimup. For 16 months she worked as such at Mallalah, SA, and since then has been at Pearce, where she re-mustered to her present job. Her romance has been a service one; she met her husband, a fitter-DMT, in the course of her work. The bridesmaids for her wedding, which took place at St George's Cathedral, were both fellow-members of the WAAAF, but uniforms were discarded in favour of traditional bridal attire. ACW Diss was one of those recently awarded a Certificate of Merit for good service.

When a pilot flies "blind" he depends entirely on the instruments in the cockpit, so it is no wonder that ACW Florence Sexton takes seriously her job of testing and repairing instruments. Answering to her name, she poked her head out of the cockpit of a Spitfire and climbed out of the machine to wax enthusiastic about her work. The machine, she explained, was in for overhaul, and she had just checked the instruments and was busy replacing the panel.

Enlisting as a technical trainee two years ago, ACW Sexton is another WAAAF for whom romance and service have gone hand in hand. She met her husband, then in the army, when she was doing her three months' preliminary course at the Perth Technical School and they were married at Port Pirie a few months ago. He is now in the RAAF.

### Checks Instruments in Flight.

Since completing her course in Sydney as an instrument repairer, a course which covered practical work and a theoretical knowledge of the operation of all types of aircraft instruments, ACW Sexton has been posted to three stations and has worked on a variety of aircraft, including Ansons, Vultee Vengeance dive bombers, Wirraways, Tiger Moths, Beauforts, Spitfires and an occasional Liberator. She often checks instruments while a plane is in flight. Prior to joining the service she lived on a farm at Quairading. The only other WAAAF instrument repairer with the unit is ACW E. Wilson, also of Western Australia, who was one of the first girls enlisted for technical work. The highlight of the career of these two girls was when an Anson recently landed at the station for overhaul and they did all the instrument work without assistance from the men. They were the only two on duty who had previously handled an Anson instrument panel.