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## **Kenneth Wilfred Meldrum**

Ex RAAAF WW11 – 84441

### **1926**

Full name is Kenneth Wilfred Meldrum

Born on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 1926

At Hillcrest Salvation Army Hospital 23 Harvest Road, North Fremantle, Western Australia.

Parents – Sydney Charles John Meldrum and Ethel Muriel Meldrum (Nee Hannah).

At that time my parents lived upstairs on top of Arthur E Davies & Co Funeral Directors, 85 Market Street on the corner of Bannister Street, Fremantle, Western Australia

Occupation of Father – Accountant.

### **1927**

When I was approximately 18 months old (1927) my mother noticed I could not lift my left arm and had trouble standing. The Doctor came and said he could not find anything wrong with me, I was only playing, my mother did not agree, so Doctor held out to shillings to me, I went to take it with my right hand, he said no the left. As I was unable to lift the left one he put me in hospital for observation.

It turned out that I had Infantile Paralysis (now called Poliomyelitis). My parents were told to have me Baptised and photo taken, as I definitely would not survive. In the 1927 Epidemic only two survived, a girl and me, she has since died. This was a big shock to them as I would have been the second child they would lose, the first being my elder brother Sydney Thomas Meldrum born 7<sup>th</sup> December 1924 and died 29<sup>th</sup> October 1925 (not Polio). Also mum was 4 months pregnant with me when he died.

Joan (my younger sister) and I went to Subiaco Senior State School in Bagot Road near Rokeby Road, Subiaco. Mr Alan. R. Morrison BA, Dip Ed Head Teacher (Headmaster of Principal). In the mornings Mr Morrison used to give me massages for my Polio in his office. In the afternoons all weekdays I used to walk up to the Children's Hospital on corner of Hay and Thomas Streets for my massage therapy (Polio).

When World War 2 started in September 1939 my Grandfather became an Air Raid Warden in Subiaco, I used to help him at times.

I joined the Volunteer Defence Corp (Home Guard) its base was the R.S.L. Hall (now the Irish Club) at 61 Townshend Road, Subiaco. I had a few problems with my Polio arm but managed, I stayed in the VDC until I joined the Royal Australian Air Force.

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A few of the things the VDC trained us in: bombs, rifles, signals, unarmed combat, marching, Bren Gun Carriers in sand hills at City Beach. Bombs we did in what was bush that is now Cliff Sadlier Park, off Cunningham Terrace, Daglish. I think Cliff Sadlier was one of our instructors. Also at times in the bush that is now Floreat Park.

The war (World War 2) started while I was at school and as Jim Prior and I were the biggest two boys we had to put on Gas suits & Gas masks and go to classrooms and let the students see us in them. The school had slit trenches dug in playgrounds, they were in L shape so as to be able to go around a corner if plane strafing.

In 1940 Mr Alan Morrison called me to his office and said Ken you have to leave school today, as you are 14. (Those days had to leave school at 14 years of age)

### **1940**

I started work at foy's (Foy & Gibson's) (Later called David Jones)

### **February 1944**

Two mates of mine at Foy's and I went down to number 4 Recruiting Centre, McNeil Chambers, Barrack Street, Perth, about two doors down from St Georges Terrace, opposite Stirling Gardens to enlist in the Royal Australian Air Force.

I had eight doctors one after the other check me out and in the end said I was A1 (That's the best you can get) but said your left arm is weak (my Polio arm), still got in...

We marched down Barrack Street, Wellington Street to the Railway Station and boarded a train to go to Busselton to do our rookie training. I had trouble marching with the .303 Le Enfield Rifle at the slope, as my left arm (Polio arm) could not hold it long at the slope because of the Polio weakness, so I was sent to the medical officer who ordered I that I was not to be made to carry it at the slope and recommended I have a Thompson sub machine gun (was carried slung over the shoulder) or a revolver (worn in holster on belt). We had been trained with these. Our six weeks course was done in four weeks, as they urgently needed men.

I was then sent to Royal Australian Air Force headquarters Western area in Australian Natives Association building (Air Force took over all the building) 44 St Georges Terrace, Perth, on north side between London Court and Barrack Street. As no living quarters I lived back home with Grandmother & Joan at 234 Hensman Road, Subiaco. I worked in a room upstairs facing a laneway.

### **21/4/1944 Friday**

I was sent to RAAF Headquarters Western Area Transport section that was on the corner of William Street and The Esplanade, Perth. The Air Force commandeered it for the war years. Next door was the Embassy Ballroom and the Capital Theatre.

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### **28/4/1944 Friday**

I was posted to 14 Squadron (Code name Group 602) RAAF Station Pearce (Bullsbrook) Western Australia. Phone was a Country trunk line call; you phoned number UJ250 the Guildford exchange and asked for Extension 216. It was an operational mobile Beaufort Bomber Squadron and defended the whole West Australian coastline, that's why there were no females in the Squadron. Adjutant Flight Lieutenant was Berryman (the scull) and the Commanding Officer Squadron Leader was Thompson?

### **7/7/1945 Saturday**

I was posted to AA & GS (Air Armament Gas and Gunnery School at Nhill, Victoria to be on staff, not a course. So I was sent to 5 PD (Personnel Depot) on the corner of Salvado Road & Selby Street, Jolimont Western Australia. This is where you are sent to go anywhere in the world or for discharge. Opposite is Henderson Park. On the Saturday afternoon I went to the football match at Subiaco when a RAAF Dakota (DC3) flew overhead, it was conveying the body of Prime Minister John Curtin from Canberra to Perth for burial.

The plane was built in the US in 1944 and delivered to the RAAF's 37 Squadron in early 1945. During the 1950's it saw action in the Korean War and Malayan Emergency. In 1968 it was allocated to transport work in Malaysia and saw action in Vietnam. It's still in flying condition and belongs to the Australian War Memorial and finally grounded. It is preserved as an example of its type in Technology Hall at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

On looking at it fly over, little did I think that in a few hours I would be on it. Very early next morning (Sunday) they woke me up and said get dressed, come to the cookhouse for breakfast, I was then taken out to Dunreath RAAF Airport, (now Perth Airport). Those days Perth Airport was in Maylands down the end of Peninsula Road between Peninsula Road and the Swan River, now the W.A. Police Academy & Maylands Public Golf Course.

At Dunreath I got into the Dakota and sat on the Port side (Left) half way between the front and door. Down the centre was our kit bags stacked at our feet. Those days there was no upholstery and the plane not lined and no toilet or refreshments. It was raining and cold, the plane took off just as the sun was about to come up. It got very wet in the plane as the humidity turned to water drops on the metal ceiling and dripped down on us.

It was a very slow trip, we landed at Kalgoorlie to take fuel and for us to go to the toilet and stretch our legs. Next was Forrest for the same, in the building at Forrest it has one wall with photos of WA and a clock with WA time on the opposite wall the same, only South Australia. Next stop was Parafield, South Australia for the same and then off to Essendon, Victoria and landed at Midnight. Approximately a 23-hour flight.

The crew had a car come out to the end of the runway where they parked to pick them up and told us one was coming for us. Well, it never turned up so we decided to walk. As the ladder was not down the first to jump ended up to their

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knees in mud as the plane was parked on the edge of the runway at the far end in the dark.

On getting down to the buildings we were unable to find anyone to help us, so we went to the main gate and the guard said best thing to do would be to thumb a ride into Melbourne. I got a lift to the Salvation Army Services building and they had temporary triple Decker bunk beds. It was in Little Bourke Place, off Little Bourke Street, up near Spring Street.

In the morning I reported to the RAAF Traffic Office in Spencer Street Rail Station. He said you have just missed the train, so report back early tomorrow morning. So I had a day in Melbourne. Next day I reported and was put on a single self propelled rail car nicknamed the peanut. I arrived at Nhill during daylight and got out to the RAAF Station and reported to Headquarters. I was sent on a fairly long walk to a shed and got a bag of straw to sleep on the floor in a hut a long way from headquarters. Next day I went to Headquarters and was given my own office, it had an electric radiator that I laid bread over and made toast, a telephone, Gestetner printer and a few other things.

They asked me where I was quartered and I told them and they replied your on staff not a trainee. So, I was moved to a hut for staff only which was opposite the Headquarters office and next to it was the kitchen and mess and behind it was showers and toilets. Inside it we had a large steel stove on iron legs in the centre to keep it warm and we all had metal folding stretcher beds with mattresses, pillows, wardrobes, but no sheets or pillowslips.

The base was referred to as AAGGS (Air Armament Gas & Gunnery School). They had all the different types of gun turrets in large hangers for aircrew to be trained on and all types of bombs & gas for training armourers. In the mornings it was very cold and visibility nearly zero because of fog so they had white hand rails around the pathways about 3 feet high so we felt our way around. Sometimes we had to hit the pipes to try and get water. Planes were often unable to take off or land until the fog lifted later in the morning.

I was told I should have got off the plane at Parafield, South Australia and caught a train to Nhill. No one had told me this and at that stage I had no idea where Nhill was. It's near the border of South Australia and Victoria on the Victorian side. Anyway I ended up with a day in Melbourne.

On leave we used to go into the town of Nhill and go to the pub for a while and if it were a Saturday we would go to the local football. Opposite the Railway Station was a Serviceman's Hospitality place so you could go there and play billiards or something. We also went to the pictures in town although we also had a good picture theatre back at the base.

When the war ended with Japan the office staff cut stencils on how the discharges would be handled and passed them on to me. I printed them out and made books of them stapled in the centre and everyone got one (I still have one in my tin trunk). The Commanding Officer got everyone together and said we would all get 7 days leave, but he wanted 6 volunteers to remain and look after the base. So I volunteered as Perth was too far away. We ended up with me at

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Headquarters, a driver, a guard, medical person who could also drive, ambulance, cook and munitions person. We had a good time while the others were away, sleeping in, no work; the driver got good fresh food from the farms that cook prepared. When they all returned the Commanding Officer said we had all done a good job and as a reward we could have leave and transport to anywhere in Australia for two weeks. I selected to go to Adelaide as having been there a few times before.

I went by train that leaves Nhill around midnight and gets to Adelaide about 6am. I went back to base by train and found the camp nearly deserted, being a training camp and the war over, all trainees had been sent to Discharge Centres.

### **25/09/1945 Tuesday**

I packed my bag and caught the midnight train (The Overlander) to Melbourne. I was to work in Royal Australian Air Force Headquarters Record Re 4 Department at 319 Chapel Street, Prahran, Victoria (a suburb of Melbourne) phone number LA1581 Ext26. It was an old building that had been condemned and to be demolished but was saved for use by the Air Force (in 2004 it was still there). It was I think 7 floors high and I was on one of the top floors. The building shook in the wind and the floorboards creaked. The lifts never always worked and only six of us did my job for the whole RAAF. As I was a Clerk Leading Aircraftsman class I was on 8 shillings (80 cents) a day. Our job was to be a sort of detective in bookwork, go through files/records of all Air Force members and if find a mistake check it out for correct information and then fill in forms to send to the unit that made the mistake on sending somewhere or to the unit that received that person and made the mistake. I had access to everybody's papers except mine and people working with me, theirs was locked in the Commanding Officers safe.

We worked Monday to Friday's, not sure if it was 8am or 9am but we finished at 5pm. We had one hour for lunch and no Saturday or Sunday work. They had no living quarters so they gave us a living away allowance. It was not hard to find a place as you just had to go to any serviceman's hospitality place or church halls that helped servicemen and they would give you a list of people who would take someone in, or public guest houses.

In a short time I tried a few with different airmen but was not happy about the places or person. Where I worked in Chapel Street next door to us was Reads Department Store (same as Charles Moore's of Perth) on the corner of Commercial Road (Commercial Road changes its name to Malvern Road once it crosses Chapel Street) and the Air Force had the upper floors of their store. To the left of us was Wattle Street and on the other side of Wattle Street in Chapel Street was Foy & Gibson's (Foy's) Department store (I worked in their branch in Perth) I made myself known and they gave me a 10% discount card for their store, I often had lunch in their restaurant.

Well, the Air Force also had their upper floors and an enclosed walkway was put across the road between the two buildings at an upper level and Air Force staff used our building to come and go by using the high walkway.

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### **10/06/1946 Monday**

Victory Day holiday had a very large parade through the streets of Melbourne today. Leading the parade through the city streets in the morning was General Sir Thomas Blamey mounted on an all white horse. Revelling went on all day and night, dancing on the streets etc. I have a copy of the Melbourne newspaper called the Sun News Pictorial dated Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> 1946 with pages of photos of it.

We came back west to be discharged from the Air Force, we went out to Essendon Airport and got on a Dakota (DC3) I had too much luggage but was able to wangle it on board. When we arrived at Dunreath RAAF Air Base (now Perth Civilian Airport I went to 5PD (5 Personnel Depot) on the corner of Selby Street & Salvado Road, opposite Henderson Park, Jolimont W.A for my discharge. I had to go to the showgrounds in Claremont for my chest X Rays before discharge and back to Jolimont to finish. Finally discharged on 28/06/1946.

### **01/07/1946 Monday**

I started back at Foy and Gibson's (Foy's)(later called David Jones) in my old job in the Blinds, Awnings, Bedding, Bedsteads, and Cots etc as a Salesman. I could have got an apprenticeship as an electrician or Motor Mechanic if I had wanted to but I rejected it, as I would have a wage drop.

### **19/09/1978**

David Jones closed down in Western Australia so 900 of us lost our jobs. In 1951 I had my first managers job and over the years worked my way up in the Company. On ending my time with the Company I had been with them 38 years and reached the position of Group Departmental Manager, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the top of the Company. I have been retired for some time and I am a full time carer for my wife of 52 and a half years.

9<sup>th</sup> October 2004.



*Melbourne 1945*



**Kenneth Wilfred Medrum – taken on 17/2/2000**  
**Above-Kenneth in Melbourne in 1945 & wearing gas suits and masks.**