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## **Ray F Miller**

The War broke out in September 1939. I was in the Sea Scouts at Pelican Point at the time under the leadership of our “Skipper”, Science Master at Perth Boys’ School, Hal McKail, whose class I was to join two years later in 1942 – 44.

At Scouts, besides passing our various Badges, we had extra-curricular activities such as boat building, repair and maintenance, wood and metal work, boat handling and seamanship, which also included learning to swim. We also had senior (Rover) Scouts in the troop who were doing either apprenticeships or Army or Navy training of some sort, who would give us some of these extra-curricular activities.

Because it was wartime, the Sea Scouts with their “Skipper” Hal McKail, were heavily involved in the war effort. Stationed at “Camp Cornwall” in the Lookout Tower among the scout buildings, was an Observation Post of the Volunteer Air Observer Corps. Their job was to mount a 24-hour surveillance of the activities of all aircraft within visual range of the lookout.

We had to report the type and nationality of the aircraft, compass bearing and direction of flight, by direct phone line to Head Quarters. We had to give our Post’s code name, “Love Tare Four” (LT4) followed by our report. A number of our scouts were on this roster during the war years. It was a demanding job reporting and recording in our Log Book all this information.

Because our Post was right next door to the American Navy’s Catalina base in Crawley Bay, my two-hour shift was in the thick of it – 0600 to 0800 hours in all sessions. In winter, at first light, when so many Catalina Flying Boats were heading out on their dawn patrols along our northwest coast, was the busiest time. Half a dozen or more might take off in quick succession in the space of twenty minutes to half an hour and each had to be reported and logged immediately – and there were other aircraft of all sorts buzzing about in all directions as well – we were not that far from “Dunreath” Air Base, code name for South Guildford, the site of our present Domestic Airport. These rapid-fire take offs occurred just after the bombing of Darwin, Wyndham and Broome and it was a very busy time.

Fortunately we had training sessions that helped us to identify all aircraft likely to be found in the South West Pacific area (SWPA) but we had to know all the Allied and Australian aircraft as well. Actually, at these training sessions we had competitions to test our competency in aircraft identification.

Flights of up to about twenty aircraft, all of one type or mixed were projected onto the screen for decreasing lengths of exposure time. Those who correctly identified all the aircraft flashed onto the screen in the shortest exposure, one twenty-fifth of a second, were awarded a prize. These training sessions were considered almost standard requirements for all volunteers of the VAOC. At the end of 1942, my first year at Perth Boys’ School, I won the prize at State level, which consisted of a chrome-plated, emptied out and defused incendiary bomb – very impressive sitting there on the mantel.

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Those of us VAOC Volunteers who were at Perth Boys' had the added incentive of having the encouragement and the enthusiasm of Science Master Hal McKail in making rope fenders and camouflage nets for the war effort as well as our VAOC air spotting which we took very seriously.

I remember very clearly, when one morning my relieving 'spotter' did not turn up to take over from me at 0800 hours at the Lookout. I was not allowed to leave my post until he arrived and had signed on, before I could sign off. When finally he arrived, I was able to ride my bike home, bolt down some breakfast, grab my school bag and tear off again to school. This was three and a half miles from Thomas Street, Nedlands to P.B.S. around Mounts Bay Road, up Mill Street, along the Terrace to William Street, over the Horseshoe Bridge and east on Roe Street and into the back gate of school.

Just before mid morning having ridden hell for leather, I walked into our classroom to my seat still puffing. Our teacher Mr Langley, himself an instructor with the school Air Cadets, asked me quietly to explain my lateness. I replied very matter of factly, so as not to raise alarm or curiosity with the rest of the class, "I will explain fully at recess Sir". This he accepted and continued what he had been saying to the class. Of course I went up and explained to him fully when we were on our own. I am sure he understood my confidentiality and commended me for my handling of the situation.



**PHOTOGRAPH – Ray Miller – VAOC approx 13 years and younger brother Doug Miller approx 11 years – Sea Scouts, Pelican Point, Crawley.**

**Circa 1941/42**