

John Robert Moore

WORLD WAR II

Born 20 March, 1926 at Northam, WA

Long before I heard the Australian Prime Minister (Robert Menzies) tell his radio audience that it was his 'melancholy duty' to inform us that we were at war with Germany on 3 September, 1939, I had followed the expansion of German domination in Europe. The 'bays and capes' geography teaching of those years and my close attention to the news services heard on my crystal set, especially while in bed at night, helped me to understand that war was almost inevitable. Would it last as long as WWI? By 1940, when I needed to choose subjects for study in Year 10, I included Physics because that would help if I was accepted for aircrew training. The usual two years for the Leaving Certificate took me three years partly because of wartime disruptions, which included the transfer of boarders to other accommodation. The US command wanted our boarding house in 1942 as a hospital.

My father and mother had served during WWI, as well as my grandfather, who survived a torpedo attack and several uncles, one of whom was prisoner in Germany for most of the war. During WWII, my step-brother was captured at Rabaul early in 1942 but it was not until November 1945 that we learnt of his presumed death when the Montevideo Maru was sunk by a US torpedo on 1 July 1942 with the loss of allied prisoners of who were being transported to Japan. My sister was in the AAMWAS and eventually served in the hospital at Jaquinot Bay, New Ireland, and my mother spent days each month running canteens for service personnel on leave in the Perth city area. For three years I was in the Signals Corps of the school Army Cadets. With this background, it was little wonder that I attended morse lessons during early 1944 as I waited to be called up by the RAAF on 25 March, 5 days after my 18th birthday and three months before D Day.

The adventure began with a troop train journey to Adelaide and Victor Harbour for initial training for 3 months followed by an extended course at Ballarat. I graduated in mid-February, after two weeks at West Sale, from 52 Course as a Wireless Operator Air, Emergency Air Gunner (having never fired a shot!) with the rank of Sergeant. By this time, the end of the war seemed a possibility within a few months but lest this should not occur, training of Navigators continued at Bairnsdale, Victoria. I was stationed there as a Staff WAG from 4 April until November after which I returned to Perth for discharge which was completed on 12 December.

Except for one hour in a Beaufort bomber, all of my 200 hours of Air Force flying was in Arvo Ansons at Ballarat and Bairnsdale. They were not without incident but in every case we landed safely, unlike the hapless crews caught out over Bass Strait on a training exercise two weeks before I arrived at Bairnsdale. Fog spread across the lowland of East Gippsland before they could land safely and despite the best efforts of air traffic controllers, the girls in the wireless hut, the pilots and wireless operators, at least two aircraft crashed with loss of life. This was a sobering thought for me when flying at

night on 7 occasions during the next 4 months. On only one occasion was approaching fog a problem and all planes landed safely before the airfield was closed.

While we were carrying out an exercise near Ballarat in December 1944, the winds from the north dramatically increased in intensity. Fortunately the pilot appreciated the nature of the problem and he maintained engine power until we were safely on the ground. One other occasion, when we were on our way to Sydney for a "docks recce" exercise, was a bit of a worry. Apparently a chock was still in place in the aircraft tail and manoeuvring was difficult. By tossing the aircraft about, the pilot dislodged the obstruction and we continued on our way but not before I had been asked to send an SOS to base and an explanation of our predicament.

No, this isn't the account of a 'war hero' – I was born at least a year too late for that possibility. However, like many others, I was prepared to receive training and to take my place wherever needed. I am thankful for the service and sacrifice of others who made it unnecessary for me to leave this country. When I am asked what I did in the war, I reply I took part in the 'Battle of the Bass Strait'. This has a tenuous link with reality since we were expected, when flying out over the Strait, to keep watch for submarines. Of course, this was impossible when dare-devil pilots flew at wave-top altitude between Bairnsdale and Western Junction (Launceston). Low flying was against the rules but navigators and WAGS could do little about it except hope for the best.

Fresh out of boarding school, I enjoyed the company of others, both male and female and kept in touch with some of them for a few years until we drifted apart. I have maintained my interest in the air force through membership of the RAAF Association since 1946. With the assistance of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, I attended The University of WA from which I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in March 1949. I taught at Christ Church Grammar School from 1949 to 1953 and have been on the staff of Pulteney Grammar School, since 1954 (51 years) as Senior Master of Geography, Librarian and now (2004), part time Archivist.