R.A.A.F. DAYS

RECRUITS &
REQUISITIONS

REPATRIATION &
RECOVERY

REMINISCENCES OF THE
R.A.A.F. IN WWII

SGT. ARTHUR R. PEARCE
CLERK, GENERAL. CLASS III

EDITED AND WRITTEN BY
HARVEY R. PEARCE

R.A.A.F. DAYS

RECRUITS & REQUISITIONS

REPATRIATION & RECOVERY

REMINISCENCES OF THE R.A.A.F. IN WWII

SGT. ARTHUR R. PEARCE
CLERK, GENERAL. CLASS III

EDITED, COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY
HARVEY R. PEARCE

I.T. ASSISTANCE BY
ROWLAND F. PEARCE

EDITOR'S ACKNOWLDGEMENTS

Portions of the main text are reproduced from two essays written by my father at various times. One account was headed 'Service at RAAF Station Pearce' and dealt specifically with his enlistment, callup and drill squad experiences. The second essay, blandly entitled 'On Active Service', was the story of his essential role in the formation of the Second Mobile Works Squadron and his part in its development and mobilisation to Wards Strip near Port Moresby in Papua.

I am thankful for his time and effort in producing both works. However, for the purposes of fluency, lucidity and clarity as well as the elimination of tautology, rewording here and there has been necessary.

The balance of the text has largely been my own work based on what Dad had told Mum, my siblings and I over the years. Further to this, I have used Dad's service record documents, obtained from the National Archives of Australia in Canberra. Additionally, I was able to gain access to Dad's medical records at the National Archives branch office, East Victoria Park, in W.A.

Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge the following individuals and groups for their contribution in confirming, clarifying or refuting various aspects; in no intentional order other than alphabetical:

Diane Crow (nee Pearce), Victoria
Harry Hodgkiss of the Catalina Club, WA
A. Graham Pearce, WA
Joyce A. Pearce, WA
Kingsley R. Pearce, Victoria
Roy S. Pearce, Victoria and
RAAF Association Museum and Library, Bull Creek, WA

To my son, (and Arthur's grandson) Rowland F. Pearce. Through triumph and tribulation, his knowledge and assistance with the family computer has been fundamental to this tome without which could not have been produced in this form.

And finally, to my wife, Julia, for her unbounded tolerance of my research expeditions, outbound telephone calls and oddly timed research and writings.

Harvey R. Pearce, Queens Park, WA. October 2002. ©
Email address: hrpearce@hotmail.com

Courtesy of
Australian War Memorial

Since the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies' (pictured right) declaration of war in September, 1939, I had seen a significant number of my friends and associates sign up for duty in our nation's defence forces. Most of them had joined the army; fewer still had gone into the navy and air force.

For my part, I felt that I too should enlist, but which branch of the services should I join? This was the question in my mind that I had to determine for the greater good.

The army? No, I didn't quite see myself as a 'footslogger'! The navy perhaps? Probably not - I felt that I didn't have a great deal to offer the 'senior service' as a 'tar' and it didn't appear to have much to satisfy me, at least as I saw it. The air force? Hmm, now that sounded more like my style!

As a young lad, then as a youth, my imagination had always been fired by the aerial exploits of early aviation pioneers. Names like Ross and Keith Smith then Bert Hinkler, Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm had inspired me for as long as I could remember. Although I'd never flown in an aeroplane, I reckoned that I had the intestinal fortitude for the topsy-turvy lifestyle of a flying ace - not that I had any delusions of grandeur!

By June of 1940, now aged 20 and with my mind now made up, along with Pop's certified permission, I applied to the Royal Australian Air Force for enlistment on the fourteenth of the month. It happened to be the same day that the Germans crossed the Maginot line and took formal possession of the French capital, Paris.

By mail, four weeks later, I was given an appointment on the twenty-fifth of July, for an interview and medical status to be recorded. At the conclusion of the appointment, the recruitment people issued me with a RAAF Reserve badge. As I left their offices, I was a trifle miffed that they hadn't had the good sense to take me in straightaway. However, I thought, "Well perhaps they just might know what theyr'e doing!"

From then on, I proudly wore that badge on my coat lapel or jumper, for I knew that it's mere sight would prevent an accusing finger at me or white feathers being sent to me anonymously.

Early in August, out of the blue, the Army sent me an unsolicited call-up notice with a date on which to present myself. On the appointed day, I fronted up to the Army's designated recruiting depot where I informed the people that I was already in the Air Force Reserve. Then they took one look at my lapel badge and all but told me to get lost! At the same time, they added that I was to ignore any further communication from them in the event that their own clerical system hadn't caught up with my confirmed status.

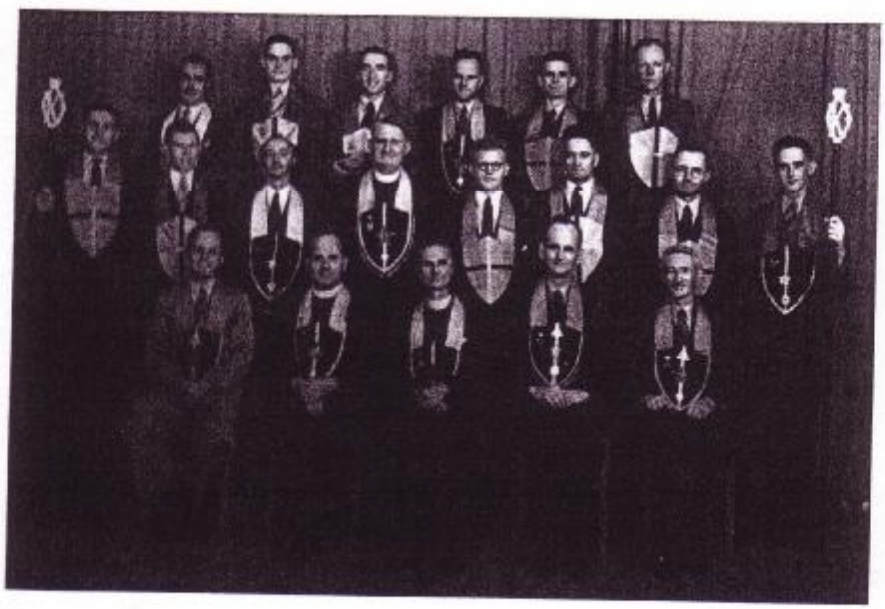
On September twenty-first, my younger brother Roy (pictured left) turned 18 years of age and, like me, felt the need to join the Air Force. Now Roy was in the final stages of his apprenticeship as a radio engineer and just after his birthday he applied to enlist in the reserve of the RAAF. Doubtless because of his civillian vocation, he was immediately accepted. So desperately did the Air Force want him, I couldn't imagine that his feet touched the ground - for a few days at least!

For the remainder of the year, I got on with my job at real estate agents, E & S Harper at Cottesloe. Resuming cricket practice at the Nedlands Club in October, it was fairly evident that with the number of clubmates who'd joined up in the preceding six months, the club would have to drastically curtail it's core activities for the duration of the war. As a result, I contemplated going back to playing social tennis as a last resort.

Similarly, the Methodist Order of Knights, a church lodge (pictured below) to which I had belonged, was also having problems as members enlisted in the various armed forces.

Generally, manpower was becoming scarce and although the government enforced system of rationing wasn't set to come into full force for another eighteen months, the welfare of most people was affected by shortages of a large range of imported goods – particularly from Britain. Christmas, alas, was not to be the same as it had been prior to the war's commencement.

On December the twelfth, I received a letter from the Air Force requesting that I present myself to their No. 4 recruiting centre at Yorkshire House, 44 St George's Terrace in Perth for a chest x-ray. No doubt, they were ensuring that I didn't have tuberculosis or some such serious disease of the lungs.



1941

During the first week of January, I received written advice that I had passed all tests and that I would be classed as a 'clerk general'. The very next day, another letter was received at home - 23 Cooper St, Nedlands - giving formal notice from Western Area, RAAF to report for basic training at 44 St George's Terrace, Perth at 7am on Thursday the sixteenth of January. At about 8am, along with a lot of other young men, I was herded like a prime steer on board one of a number covered trucks in convoy and transported to the RAAF Station Pearce at Bullsbrook. It was there that we were allocated to a hut to house twenty-seven recruits in the rookie area of the southern sector of the station. We were each assigned our service numbers, mine being 29622 and collectively we were to be known as Drill Squad No. 31 (pictured below). Our drill instructor was Corporal Jack O'Hehir who marched us to the clothing store where each airman was issued with a complete kit of Air Force clothing and equipment including a .303 rifle. Loaded up with everything including both summer and winter uniforms, we were marched back to our barracks hut to sort our equipment as well as learning how to polish our footwear. Many a hour was to be spent with considerable use of spit and boot polish to give our boots a patent leather look. After a week or so, our footwear looked spick-and-span.

Our second day on the station was used for the basic drill and trying to march as a unit. No doubt we appeared rather ragged for the first few days. Our main problems in marching both morning and afternoon were the prevalence of bush flies and the fahrenheit century heat. Our normal parade clothing was khaki shirt, shorts, slouch hat, long socks and black boots. For virtually all of us in the squad the boots made ache and it was a relief to cast them off for rest periods and drop onto the wooden bed boards and relax. 'our feet'

One night in the barracks as we prepared for bed, the recruits were generally discussing jobs and postings we would individually prefer given our various physical and intellectual

assets and limitations when one of the other chaps piped up and admitted to being colour-blind. Others too including myself confirmed the same affliction. To varying degrees, it turned out that from our entire drill squad of some twenty seven members, only one was NOT colour blind. Even the officers and non-commisioned officers (NCOs) expressed amazement at the high rate of colour blindness in our squad. Now having this handicap meant denial of certain aspects of service; pilot training was out because of the inability to distinguish different colours of flares for instance. Similarly, training as an electrician wasn't possible - wiring was insulated in an array of colours and aircraft armouring (loading ammunition into aircraft) was not to be considered due to the 'ammo' being colour coded according to the type of weaponry it was to suit.

The usual daily routine was to be in marching position by 8am after a 7am breakfast in the airmens' mess. The squad formed upon the roadway on the south side of sleeping hut. Then off we would march via the roadway to the drill square.

On about the ninth day - Friday - we were marched to the Station Sick Quarters (SSQ) to be inoculated and vaccinated for such diseases as smallpox and cholera, et cetera. Quite a few airmen passed out when being inoculated with the hypodermic needles. It being a Friday, we were given home leave from that evening until Sunday morning. Home for me was 23 Cooper Street, Nedlands (pictured left). When I returned from an uneventful leave, I found that all of my squadmates had gone down very ill over the Saturday as a direct effect of the injections. They'd spent all of their leave in bed and yet I was quite well! In hindsight and from the standpoint of our superiors, there was certainly method in their madness, not to mention slyness! However the post injection illness caught up with me on Monday afternoon when I developed a blinding headache and a raging temperature 105°F (40.6°C). I reported to the SSQ and was immediately admitted. Apparently the heat of the day together with the intensive marching had contributed to my severe illness. I was let out on the Wednesday feeling somewhat better.

Our squad spent half a day on the rifle range learning how to shoot with our .303 rifles. My marksmanship was not so good - I did not register a single bullseye.

On another day, we spent a couple of hours at going into a gas chamber with and without a gas mask. Having to endure a couple of minutes of tear gas was not comfortable and brought much tears to the eyes but we were all grateful to get out into the fresh air. The gas hut was located on the north - west side of the parade square. Thank goodness we only had one session of this gas test. A distinctly memorable, if not embarassing occasion was on one of the commanding officer's station parades. With the exception of those service personnel engaged in essential duties, the whole of the station's servicemen had to form up on the main parade ground. Each section and recruit drill squad had to assemble and then at the instruction of the NCO or drill instructor had to reform into review format. The drill instructor then had to do a detailed inspection of each recruit's uniform, armoury and general smartness. When the DI confronted me, he enquired as to whether I'd had a shave or not that morning and if not, when was the last time. With my sparse and lightly coloured beard only just evident, I replied,

"Eight days ago, Corporal!"

With that, the whole squad burst out laughing. The DI immediately bellowed for the laughing to cease, then sent me, instantly, to the ablution block to take a razor to my face and neck until my skin was 'as smooth as a baby's bott'!

A matter of days later, our squad was dispursed to the various units or squadrons depending on our individual classifications. For my part, I was classified as a Clerk General Class IV which meant that I could finish up anywhere. In due course, I was informed that I was to be posted to the No. 4 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Geraldton where my clerical talents - such as they were - would be put to good use. With this move, my rank was elevated to Acting Leading Aircraftsman which would later be confirmed on April the first (no jokes please). The unit to which I had been posted had been formed on the tenth of February which was only a few days before my arrival. My transfer to Geraldton would be via the Great Northern Railway line aboard a train colloquially known as the 'Rattler'. Unlike the North American snake of the same name, it was both notoriously slow and invariably unreliable - timetable-wise. Settling into my new role presented no problems really even though the base was still under construction when I arrived and no flying was possible until the tenth of March. My services were very much in demand in the orderly room of the SFTS where there was a considerable turnover of personnel what with potential pilots commencing their training. Within weeks, they graduated as qualified aviators. The purpose of the school was being part of what was known as the Empire Air Training Scheme whereby aircrews from countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand were trained for rapid service in Britain's Royal Air Force. The RAF was experiencing a high attrition rate of it's own aircrews in the air war against Germany. The Battle of Britain which concluded during the previous October had a particularly significant impact on the ranks of British fighter pilots.

After a few weeks in the orderly room (pictured right), I became fairly proficient at picking the majority of new faces despite the undulating stream of personnel coming and going. Evidentally my ability on the typewriter was something of a novelty as most of the chaps had never seen an adult male 'touch-typing' before. Indeed, 'first-timers' would often do a 'double-take' when initially seeing me pounding the keys. Many years later, I would be reminded of this scenario, when, as a newly elected councillor of the Municipality of Cottesloe, I was approached by a fellow councillor, one Maurie McNamara. He asked me if I had been in the RAAF at Geraldton. I replied,

"Yes, I was!"

"Hmm, I thought so," he recalled,"you were a Leading Airman orderly".

"That's right," I confirmed.

"Yeah", Maurie continued, "you were the first bloke I ever saw who could touch-type on one of those machines!"

On the tenth of March, the Geraldton station welcomed a new commanding officer, Wing Commander P. G. Heffernan as the SFTS became fully operational.

For a significant part of the year it was good to know that Roy was also serving at Geraldton. He was doing radio direction finding amongst other things too technical for me to comprehend.

During this time, the good name of the RAAF suffered somewhat when a few of our chaps went into the town area of Geraldton and, having had a 'bootful' at one of the handful of hotels, got themselves into melees with a few of the 'locals' who were equally 'well lubricated'. There was one particular licensed establishment, The Shamrock, whose regulars, on spotting an Air Force uniform, would casually start up a stoush on some pretext or other. Eventually, the station CO had to put an 'off-limits' notice to all RAAF personnel who might have considered imbibing at that particular 'watering hole'.

For a spot of social recreation, I went to the town's tennis courts (pictured left) where I soon struck up a friendship with one John Curtin, the son of our Prime Minister. He quietly told me that most of the other chaps were a bit 'stand-offish' towards him, no doubt due to his father's position and political stature. Following a couple of jousts on the court, I found that I had a high regard for his mateship and I suspect that the feeling was reciprocated. I related to John an event which happened some three years earlier when I, as a seventeen year old, was looking after the Cottesloe office's front desk. John's dad came, unannounced, into the office reception area. Unfortunately, I hadn't known who he was, until after he left the premises, much to my undying embarrassment. At the time, John Curtin was the Leader of the Federal Opposition. In retrospect, I said to John (the son), I thought his father had probably revelled privately at the relative anonymity to which John Jr mused over and quietly agreed.

Interior of Hut 12, Geraldton

Me taking a break in barracks

Newton Wilson in Barracks Store

Geraldton Methodist Air Force Friends

One day, I turned up at the courts, ready to play, where someone told me that John had been given an urgent leave pass to go home to Cottesloe for a few days. When he returned to Geraldton, he took me aside and confided that his dad had come home from Canberra for a short break and the deterioration of the Prime Minister's general physical condition and demeanor was most evident. John added that he considered that politics had got the dirtiest game ever contrived.

On the first of April, I received my first promotion. I am now known as Leading Airman Pearce. Later that month, I quietly celebrated my twenty-first birthday. Amongst other things, I am now eligible to vote in State and Federal elections!

In the meantime, on the North African war front, at the Libyan port of Tobruk, the Australian Army's Ninth Division which mostly made up the garrisoned 30,000 troops, had been cut off from all but allied air support by German Lieutenant General Erwinn Rommell's Afrika Korps. It was Rommell's clear intention to cross North Africa, seize Egypt and thereby gain control of the vital Suez Canal. How long our Ninth Division could hold on for was anybody's guess.

Sunday the fourth of May, saw me playing a spot of tennis at the town courts. During one rally, I attempted a particularly ambitious return, when my left knee gave way. I found myself sprawled on the court in agony. After forfeiting the match, I went and sat down for the rest of the afternoon. The following day, Monday, I resumed duty in the orderly room albeit severely restricted in my movements. This persisted for the remainder of the week with no appreciable sign of improvement. After taking it easy over the weekend of the tenth and eleventh of May, I reported for work on the Monday still feeling like a cripple. Having accepted advice from a senior NCO, I presented myself to the SSQ where I was admitted for a few days. They put me on a course of anti-inflammatory drugs. Towards the end of the week and feeling considerably better, I was released back to my hut. I still had to take the medication while I was continuing to take it easy. On Monday the nineteenth, I went back to the orderly room intending to remain seated at my desk as much as possible. During the latter part of the day, I started to feel a little nauseous. Coming off duty, I returned to the hut, passing up the opportunity to have dinner in the airmen's mess. I went straight to bed and proceeded to experience a fitful night's sleep. The following morning, Tuesday, I arose from my bed, took a few steps, then passed out. Groggily, I was picked up by my mates, then after a NCO was summoned to 'take stock', I was conveyed to the SSQ. En route, I vommited in the vehicle. On arrival, I was immediately hospitalised and diagnosed with accute gastritis. It appeared to be a delayed reaction to the medication and so I remained there for seven days.

A couple of days after I was released from the SSQ, everyone was euphorically lifted with the news that Britain's Royal Navy had sunk the newly commissioned German pocket battleship 'Bismark' after a pursuit around the North Atlantic Ocean. The 'Bismark' went down while trying to make for the French port of Brest.

In June, I was granted a weekend pass, so I went home to 23 Cooper St Nedlands. Considering that it was winter, there was no surprise to discover a raging fire in the fireplace of the lounge room (pictured above). As my stepmother, Mildred, disappeared down the hallway towards the kitchen at the rear of the house, I turned to Pop and asked,

"So you had no trouble getting firewood, then?"

"Well," he said, "there's no doubt about your stepmother, you know! The other week, she was down near the back fence,when she spotted one of the bosses of the timber yard behind. Then she said to this chappy, 'Excuse me, would mind supplying me with some timber offcuts for firewood. I've got two stepsons away at the war and neither my husband nor I can chop sliced logs'. Well before we knew where we were, there must have been more than a ton of the blessed stuff heaved over the back fence with a promise to supply more later - completely gratis!"

No, there wasn't any doubt about Mil. - She had more hide than a herd of elephants and was never backwards in coming forwards!

In late June, we heard that the Germans had attacked the Russians on a 1,000 mile (1600 km) front in what was later revealed to have to been called 'Operation Barbarossa'. The German action was seen as an act of gross treachery as it contravened the non-aggression pact between the two countries which had been ratified nearly two years earlier. Meanwhile, back in Geraldton in August, I caught a cold which developed into pharyngitis causing me to lose my voice. This required yet another spell in the SSQ. The infection hung around and by September fifth, I was back in bed with accute tonsilitis.

It was about this time, that a valid yarn arose about an airman and his motor-cycle. It seems that the airman had either used up or lost his petrol rationing coupons and was desperate to get to Perth on a spot of approved leave. Obviously without petrol for his motor bike, he was left like a canoeist up the creek without a paddle. Anyhow, evidentally he did a deal with certain ground crew members and was able to lay his hands on some 90 to 100 octane rated aircraft fuel which he poured into the petrol tank of his cycle. Normally, he would have used standard or regular petrol which has an octane rating of 70 or less.

Needless to say, he got to Perth, just, but in record time. Alas, the engine was permanently shot and beyond salvation.

During this time, Roy was transferred to the Eastern States, leaving by train (pictured right).

Around the third week of November, one of the Royal Australian Navy's capital ships, HMAS Sydney, paid a brief visit to Geraldton and then put to sea. Within twelve or twenty four hours it had been sunk by the German raider 'Kormoran', with the loss of its entire compliment of officers and men. Unbenownst to me at the time, a twin engine Avro Anson aeroplane had taken off on the twenty-fourth of the month to search for survivors without success. It was only after the war did I learn that an acquaintance of mine - his name I can't recall - with whom I had tied in a high jump contest during a Methodist Order of Knights athletics joust which was barely three years before his untimely passing. I seem to recall that his father was a Methodist minister at the time. Another leave pass was granted to me in late November and was to take effect from Monday the first of December until the following Monday. The few days at 23 Cooper St proved to be a good time to recharge my 'batteries' and get a break from the barracks at Geraldton. The post-dawn hours on Monday the eighth of December saw me making my way to Perth to catch the train back to Geraldton. The journey, as usual, took a little longer than expected and it was very late in the evening when the train arrived at its destination. With a few other Air Force personnel, I made my way on foot to the base and casually remarked to my companions,

"Doesn't it seem just a little quieter to you chaps?"

There was general agreement with my observation as we walked on laden by our kitbags. Furthermore, we detected that even in spite of the lateness of the hour, we were hard pressed to pick out any houses with any lights on. Additionally, apart from the noise of the prevailing north-easterly wind blowing towards Champion Bay and the Indian Ocean, an eerie silence persisted. Eventually, we approached the main gate of the Air Force station which was in near darkness. As one of our group muttered in a low voice that it was a few minutes to midnight, a sentry yelled out,

"Halt, who goes there?"

Then I heard what sounded like a number of rifle bolts being driven into their respective breeches. Hastily, we identified ourselves in the gloom, followed by the big question,

"Why are all the station lights out?"

The sergeant of the guard stepped forward and replied,

"Oh you blokes obviously haven't heard ... ah ... the Japs have been really busy this morning. In the space seven hours they attacked the Yank navy base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, as well as Malaya, Southern Thailand, the Philippines, Guam, Hong Kong and Wake Island in the Northern Pacific and we're on red alert just in case! Alright now ... shake a leg!"

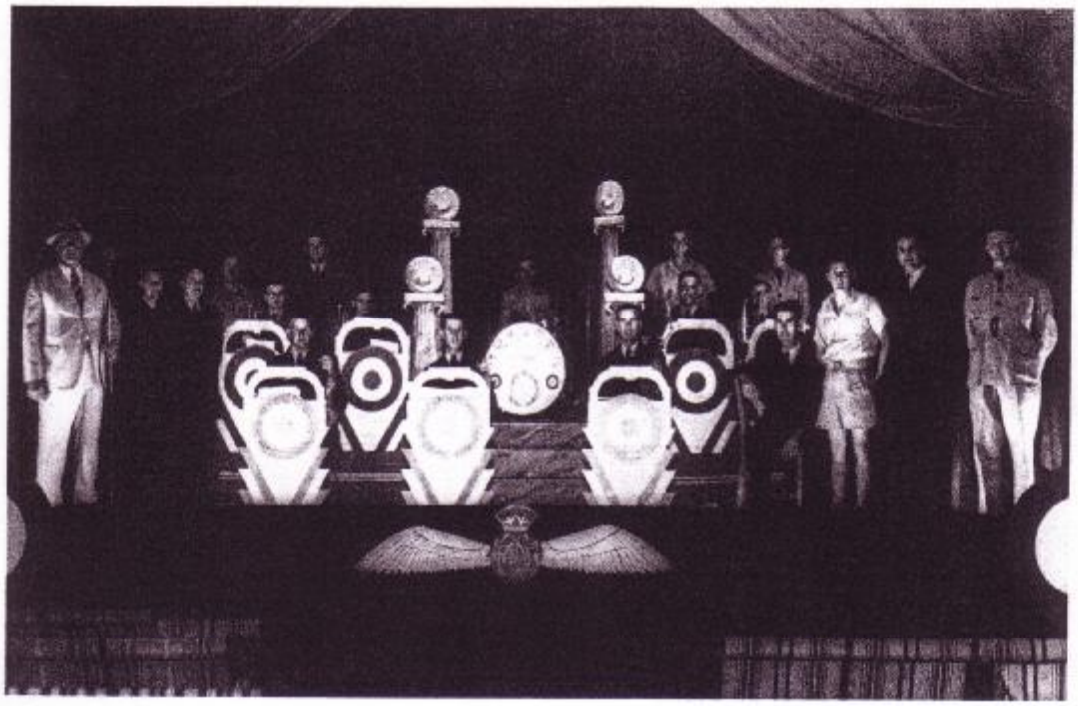
Well, it would it be an understatement to say that we were pretty stunned and as quick as we could, made our way to our respective barrack huts.

Cleanliness is next to ... !

The following morning, straight after breakfast, each squad was ordered to the main drill quadrangle for a full station muster. When assembled, the CO, Wing Commander Heffernan, confirmed that we were going onto a full war footing and that all available personnel would be required to carry out tasks to that end. Tasks like blackening out all windows, increasing perimeter fence guard duty and so on. Additionally, the CO proclaimed that all leave had been cancelled for the forseeable future and asked for volunteers to be trained for what was termed 'rear guard activities'. I was one of a couple of dozen chaps who put up their hands for this purpose. Later that week, a visiting crew of explosives experts showed us how to make, handle and deploy 'molotov cocktails' or petrol bombs. They also taught us how to identify local facilities and buildings for potential demolition and anything else which an invading enemy force could utilise. We were also expected to generally harass the enemy if we were invaded. Fortunately, we never had to resort to these tactics in reality, but at the time, the knowledge was seen to be invaluable.

On December the 11th, we heard that the Australian Ninth Division at Tobruk had been relieved by a Commonwealth force which managed to push the overstretched Afrika Korps back deep into Libya. The siege had lasted eight months. Stout but resolute defence by the Australians had caused Rommell to dub our troops 'Die Tobruk Ratten' which lead the Australians to proclaim themselves 'The Rats of Tobruk' with indignant pride.

The war's escalation notwithstanding, it was discovered that amongst the personnel at Geraldton, there was a good array of musicians, including myself on violin, and we arranged to have a few practise sessions to see if we would be good enough to perform as a small orchestra. After a couple of rehearsals, we didn't think we sounded too bad. To 'roadtest' ourselves, we obtained permission to perform a concert for Air Force personnel only at the station. From this, a lot of encouragement was received. Next, to lend our talents to the war effort and the promotion of civillian morale, a date was set down for a concert at the Geraldton Town Hall on the night of January the first, 1942. Over Christmas, we set out a varied programme and practised until we were satisfied.



January the first - New Years Day - and my promotion to the rank of Corporal has been confirmed. I'll be able to flash my new chevron - officially - at the concert tonight.

To a rousing reception in the nearby Town Hall, we performed to our best abilities, and follow-up concerts were hastily planned for the same venue. At the end of this first concert, we were told to stay on stage after the audience had filed out of the auditorium. Only then was a camera brought in to take a photograph for posterity. Imagine our surprise when, a few days later, a very praiseworthy review appeared in the newspaper.

The violin I played at the time was the same one I'd had for about five or six years soon after I began having lessons. Indeed, on a number of occasions, as a musically competent teenager I had used this instrument to play on what were called 'musical interludes' on the ABC radio station 6WF. At the time - the late 1930s - my teacher and I had to be at the broadcast studios, then on the corner of Hay and Milligan Streets in Perth, a full hour before we went 'on the air' for the usual fifteen minute programme.

Since my basic training, the violin had been every where I went. Eventually, it would accompany me to Papua and New Guinea, where to my lasting regret, due to the horrendous humidity, it would be robbed of its wonderful tone and would never be the same again.

On February the third, a new CO took command - Wing Commander Fleming. Nearly a fortnight later, the war was to enter a new, darker phase. On the fifteenth, the Japanese, having made largely unopposed progress down the Malayan peninsula, seized Singapore and a large garrison of Australian and British troups were forced into humiliating surrender. Four days later, on the nineteenth, Darwin was attacked by the Japanese for the first time.

Meanwhile, at Geraldton, work continued with renewed urgency, for we knew that it was now a desperate situation even if none of us was aware of it before.

In March, word filtered through that the American General Douglas MacArthur had fled from the Philippines island of Corregidor making what was to be the famous if not prophetic pronouncement – "I shall return!"

By late March, having seen scores of aircrews trained at Geraldton, I myself was itching to get into some sort of action, so I put in my own application for pilot training on April the sixth.

In mid-April, I was granted another seven day leave pass, so back to Nedlands I went. By this time, a Catalina flying boat base had been established at Pelican Point at the southern end of Crawley Bay. Being on the other side of the University, it was about a mile (1.6km) away from 23 Cooper St in a straight line. The first thing my stepmother told me upon my arrival was that about three or four o'clock on most mornings, much of the neighbourhood was awoken by the Catalina engines being started and warmed up prior to being towed up the river to the Narrows near Mill Point. Once there, they would begin their take-off run towards Point Walter. At the time we never knew where the Catalinas went to (it was Ceylon / Sri Lanka), but they always returned well after sunset each time.

N° 4 SFTS Clerical Staff, Geraldton

Routine office work greeted me upon my arrival back at Geraldton although it was with increasing urgency in view of almost universal Japanese conquests which drew ever closer to Australia. Repeated enemy bombing of our sparcely populated northern settlements had largely gone undefended.

On May the first, I received notification to report for pilot training effective the thirteenth of May. Alas, two days before I was due to commence the course, a new message came through, declaring that I was medically unfit for it - namely colour-blindness.

With our American allies now almost up to speed, a naval battle in the Coral Sea saw the first reversal for the 'nips'. While it was a tactical victory for the US and Royal Australian Navies, it nevertheless gave great heart to civillians and military personnel alike with all of my colleagues itching to 'get at the Empire of the Rising Sun'.

In late May, I was ordered to report to one of the senior officers at the Geraldton station. Having presented myself to the officer concerned, I was cordially invited to take a seat. He then made it abundantly clear to me that I wasn't in strife, indeed quite the contrary. He said that my duties as an orderly were keenly appreciated and regarded my organising skills as exceptional. Furthermore, the powers that be wanted me to inaugurate a new non-flying squadron to be known as the second Mobile Works Squadron (2MWS). He added that the first Mobile Works Squadron had been formed about seven weeks earlier at Ascot Vale in Victoria for the purpose of constructing airstrips and aircraft dispersal bays in advance combat zones. But the senior ranks of the RAAF quickly realised that the amount of work designated for the 1MWS was far too ambitious to undertake. Therefore, at least one more MWS would be required to fulfill the tasks intended. The officer advised me that I would have to start the squadron from scratch and that included everything from essential paperwork up, but with my abilities, the Air Force had the greatest confidence in me. He then went on to say that my role was to organise the inbound transfers of personnel,

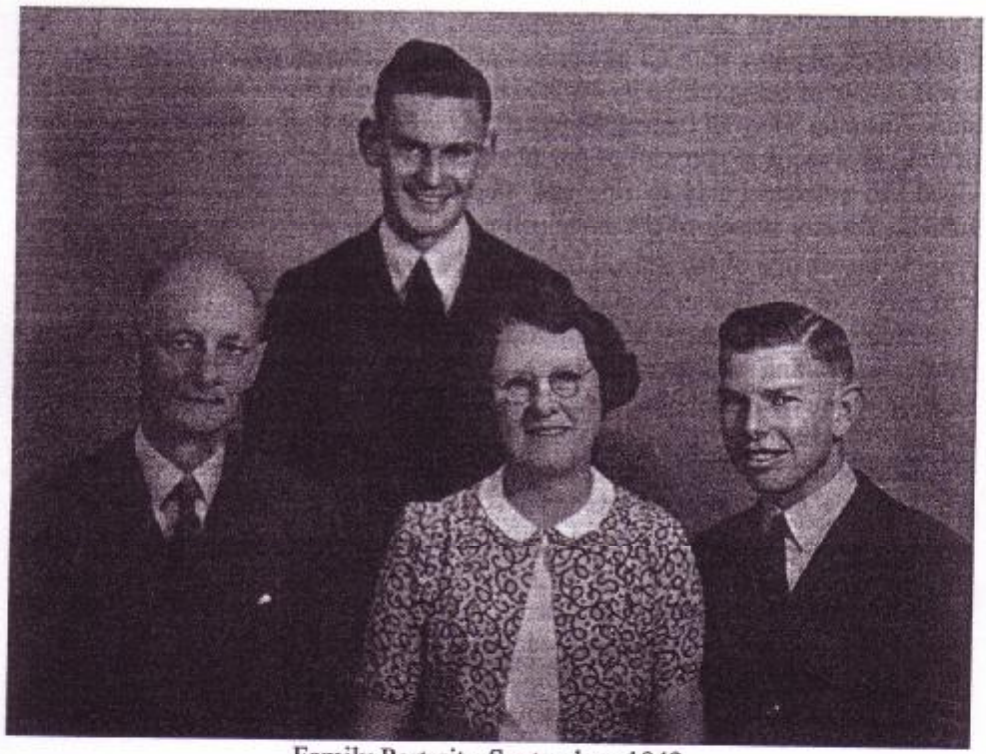
maintain their records and account for all requisitioned plant and machinery as well as consumables. Forthwith, he added, I would be promoted to the rank of acting sergeant and was to transfer back to the Pearce station, where office quarters were going to be provided.

In the first week of June, just as I was preparing for my transfer, word was filtering through of a most significant naval battle between the Japanese and rebuilt American navies around the island of Midway in the northern Pacific Ocean. In the course of four days, the Japanese fleet was largely decimated and was the beginning of the end for the 'land of the rising sun'.

At the end of the first week of June, I shifted out of Geraldton by train bound for Pearce, where on June the tenth, I 'set up shop' and had seconded to me, three personnel. Their roles would be, a stores clerk, a storekeeper and a driver, motor transport. From the outset, we were constantly busy. It would take six months to assemble plant, earthmoving equipment and a large variety of trucks including tip trucks. The squadron was placed under the command of Squadron Leader Trewin, formerly a Civil Engineer in Victoria. The COs adjutant was Flying Officer Cyril Cusack. Outside the squadron administration, Flight Lieutenant Bill Arthur was officer in charge of the construction section and the survey officer was Pilot Officer Winchcombe who came from the town of Harvey if memory serves me right.

Most of the plant and equipment was second-hand and required continual servicing by the mechanics.

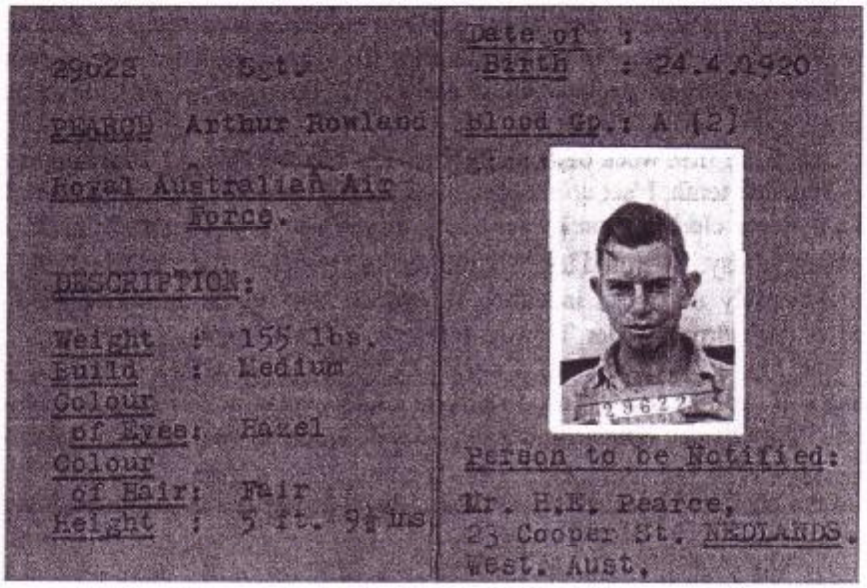
On August the first, my promotion to the rank of Sergeant, IV clerk general, was made official and on September twenty-ninth my status as a 'clerk general' elevated from IV to III.



Family Portrait - September, 1942

The orderly room staff grew to some six members prior to embarkation. During October, the still incomplete squadron was moved to RAAF Base Dunreath (later to be known as Guildford Airport and later still to be called Perth International Airport!). The purpose of this move was for the machinery operators to gain experience under the direction of the Allied Works Council. As our eventual destination was to be overseas, the demands on the

clerks were quite heavy as we were required to ensure that all personnel had made out their wills and proper identification cards were made in the possible event of any deaths in the squadron.


29028 Sgt.
PEARCE Arthur Rowland
Royal Australian Air Force.
DESCRIPTION:
Weight : 155 lbs.
Build : Medium
Colour of Eyes: Hazel
Colour of Hair: Fair
Height : 5 ft. 9½ ins.
Date of Birth : 24.4.1920
Blood Gp.: A (2)
Person to be Notified:
Mr. H.E. Pearce,
23 Cooper St. NEDLANDS.
West. Aust.

My Identification Card

About the middle of December, the squadron, now numbering some three hundred and fifty personnel, together with all equipment and stores was entrained at Midland Junction. This was inspite of being originally advised that our squadron was to operate in the north of Western Australia. Our rail convoy consisted of two goods trains, which were mainly made up of flat top wagons to carry all of our plant, bulldozers and trucks. As no carriages were provided, all personnel had to ride and sleep under, on top of or in the cabs of our equipment. By any stretch of the imagination, it was no first class tour. I was appointed Sergeant - in - charge of the second train and the journey to Parkeston (east of Kalgoorlie) took in excess of twenty four hours. Along side the Commonwealth Government Railways loco running sheds at Parkeston, the squadron's entire inventory was transfered on to the standard gauge rolling stock from the narrow gauge railway trains of the WAGR.

With the transfer, one long train was formed for the arduous journey across the Nullabor Plain to Port Pirie in South Australia. Before reaching Port Augusta, we had to cope with searing hot northerly winds which were attended by the ultra fine dust from the adjacent desert. On arrival at Port Pirie, it was again a case of unloading everything from the standard gauge train to the broad gauge train which was to take us through to Melbourne then southern New South Wales.

Meals on this goods train were somewhat irregular, depending on the frequency of stops along the way. Amongst the squadron's equipment, were two Wiles Mobile Kitchens, which eventually could be hitched to a motor truck or tractor and towed to preselected sites. Under the circumstances, the cooking staff did a remarkable job in providing meals for all the

A Wiles Mobile Kitchen (courtesy of AWM #NWA0063)

personnel on the train. Officers and 'other ranks' were served with both hot and cold 'tucker' on the long railway trek. On the evening of December twenty second, we departed from Port Pirie with my appointment as Sergeant-in-charge of the train still intact. After an exasperatingly slow journey to Melbourne, we arrived at Sunshine Railway Station, some eight miles (14km) west of the Victorian capital at about 11pm on Christmas Eve. Following a rushed 'evening' meal on the station platform, we recommenced our railway journey just after midnight. Our immediate destination was to be Tocumwal in New South Wales via Seymour, Nagambie, Shepparton and Numurkah, collectively known as 'Ned Kelly Country'. The train then crossed the Murray River and arrived at Tocumwal at about 7:30am on Christmas morning to find the weather was wet and miserable - in stark contrast to what we had experienced on the other side of Port Pirie just two and a half days earlier. As this was the end of the broad gauge line, it was 'all hands' to change trains once again to the standard gauge which would see us all the way to Brisbane. An hour or two was all that was left to have our midday meal which supplied from the enemy alien camp located adjacent to the long station platform. The meal consisted solely of a fatty greasy mutton stew - how revolting! And that was our 1942 Christmas dinner.

At about 1pm, we were ready to resume our journey and the Adjutant asked me as Sergeant-in-charge of the train whether I was satisfied that everything was in order. I replied that I wanted a full muster parade before boarding the train. When asked the reason why, I replied that I suspected that some members of the squadron were missing. Reluctantly, consent was given and all personnel were lined up on the platform whilst the squadron roll was called. When completed, it was found that at least seven airmen were absent. Hastily, arrangements were made for the equipment officer and two service policemen, having been supplied with the names and addresses of the missing airmen, returned to Melbourne in whose metropolitan area they had all resided. Apparently, they had all slipped off into the night when we had stopped at Sunshine the night before. Around 2pm, by now starting to

feel the lack-lustre after effects of the so-called Christmas dinner, we finally got under way to head into the Riverina area of southern New South Wales.

Our first stop after leaving Tocumwal was the country town of Jerilderie where the local ladies' organisations responded to a call 'above and beyond', had prepared a real 'slap-up' afternoon tea, with literally mountains of food, including Christmas cake, as well as limitless cups of tea. The members of our squadron were most grateful to the ladies for their wonderful catering, and it helped all of us to forget the unappealing Christmas dinner. After a half hour stop, we were on our way again travelling generally north-eastwards, through the towns of Narrendera, Junee, Cootamundra, Young, Cowra, Bathurst and Lithgow as well as the fine rural landscape in between. The town of Penrith gave way to the outskirts of Sydney during the early hours of December 27th. Heading north through Newcastle, on we travelled for a further two days via the towns of Taree, Kempsey, Coffs Harbour, Grafton and Casino before reaching the periphery of Brisbane. The train stopped adjacent to Yeerongpilly golf course were we had to pitch our tents in the heavy sub-tropical rain. This was our campsite for some five days, whilst our train proceeded to the Brisbane docks for the loading of our plant and machinery on board an American liberty ship, the SS Jason Lee. In the meantime, the absconders from Melbourne had caught up with the main body of the squadron where they were dealt with.

After a quiet New Years Eve and New Years Day, our airmen had to largely content themselves with improving their fitness in the subtropical humidity of the Queensland capital although the weather, on the whole was not so kind to us. Alas, it was an omen of what was to come on our sea voyage northwards into the real tropics. Monday, January 4th saw all squadron personnel boarding the ship that was to take us on the last leg of our very long journey to Papua. Our vessel was part of a convoy of liberty ships and warships, sailing at a very slow rate of knots. Within twenty four hours out of Brisbane, the convoy was hit by an exceptionally rough storm, with the vessel rolling, pitching, and tossing violently. Even the ship's screws rose up out of the sea at the stern end. The storm lasted nearly two days and further slowed the convoy. While most of our troops on board went down with sea-sickness, I was fortunate not to suffer from the dreaded 'mal de mer'.

A Liberty Ship

After some five days, steaming up the north east coast of Queensland, we arrived at Townsville, anchoring off Magnetic Island. Here we stayed, on board, for a couple of days, before the convoy weighed anchor and headed for Port Moresby, Papua. During this part of the voyage, we had a couple of false alarms of Japanese submarines in the area and several naval destroyers took off at high speed, returning some three hours later to take up convoy escort duties again. We eventually reached Port Moresby on January 14th and spent about a week camped in pre-existing sleeping quarters near the village of Konedobu while our plant and equipment was unloaded from the liberty ship. The first equipment discharged was the earthmoving machinery, so that they could prepare our proposed campsite which was less than a mile (1.6km) from the existing Wards Strip. This facility was, in turn, about seven miles (11km) north east of Port Moresby. Working to a prepared plan, the bulldozers and trucks levelled the land for access roads, tent sites and workshops. When completed, the officers', sergeants' and airmens' messes as well as the squadron's sick quarters were located at the northern end of the campsite whilst the sleeping tents and quarters were positioned in the middle. The southern sector was to be home for the workshops, stores and offices.

The campsite was situated in what was colloquially known as 'Death Valley', so named because Japanese bombers had the habit of dropping their bombs in it instead of Wards Strip.

The main task of the squadron whilst at this location was to construct a large number of aircraft dispersal bays for the parking of allied aircraft - fighters, bombers and reconnaisance alike. Each bay was to have a three-sided mound of dirt which would be approximately 10 feet (3m) in height. This would serve to protect our planes from enemy bombs and particularly, low-level strafing

The first night in Port Moresby was moonlit and we were told that there would be an air-raid from the Japs. It turned out to be what was termed as a 'nuisance raid' with one solitary Japanese aircraft, probably ineffectively armed, flying at high altitude for some three hours, so as to keep the residents and troops around Port Moresby awake for a good deal of the night. One aircraft would fly back to its base only to be replaced by another annoying aircraft. Most people were resigned to the aerial activity, and went to bed and slept, knowing that there was virtually no chance of being bombed or killed.

On the 22nd of January, a major campaign by Australian and American forces in New Guinea saw the enemy overwhelmed. The nett result was 3,000 losses for the allies and an estimated 12,000 dead Japanese. From this point on, the the nips would be chased back to their homeland. Furthermore, the last surviving Japs were evacuated from Guadalcanal on February the 14th.

For most of us who had come the cities and towns around Australia, the fundamental act of going to the toilet in a remote situation tested one's sense of decorum. For this reason, the 'thunderbox' was devised. Essentially, it is a deep hole in the ground with a few solid planks placed across it. Here and there, are spaces between the planks over which one squats to do one's business. If time and materials permitted, one could surround the 'facility' with a hessian or canvas wall to create the illusion of privacy! When the hole was filled to within a couple of feet (circa 60cm) a layer of soil was poured into it to ground level. This task as well as digging a new thunderbox proved to be a useful tool for anyone who stepped out of line or disobeyed orders.

On the 11th of March, I was diagnosed with colitis, an infection of the large bowel. Then to further complicate matters, I wrenched my right knee which matched my left knee at Geraldton nearly two years earlier.

The most significant event to occur while we were stationed at Wards Strip, was a massive one hundred Japanese plane raid during the month of April. Since around 8am we'd had a series of air-raid warnings (loud sirens) to alert all personnel of the imminent attack. Whilst the advancing enemy bombers were flying over the Owen Stanley Ranges in New Guinea, aircraft spotting teams of the allied forces had radioed through to Port Moresby that it was to be a very large air-raid. Normally, in such circumstances, troops were required to abandon work and head for slit trenches for protection. But as there was a high hill between our campsite and Wards Strip, virtually all of our squadron clambered up to the top of the hill to get a grandstand view of the enemy air-raid. Just prior to the arrival of the enemy force, all serviceable allied aircraft, mainly fighters, had become airborne and flew to the Owen Stanley Ranges via a different route. It was there that they were to await the return of the Japanese bomber force. Back on top of the hill, we felt sure that no bombs would be dropped where we were standing. Eventually, at about 11am, the large bomber force of the Japanese Air Command arrived overhead and commenced dropping their explosive payloads. While the bombing was largely inaccurate, two of our twin-engined Beaufort bombers which were being repaired, were hit at the southern end of the Wards Strip runway. The rest of the bombs fell into uninhabited areas of trees and scrub. Part of the enemy bombing force flew over Jackson's Field, an American air base to the east of Wards Strip but again the bombing was most inaccurate. From our high vantage point, we could see the raid on Jackson's Field in the distance.

Once the Japanese bombers were finished, they headed back to New Guinea via the Owen Stanley Ranges where the awaiting combined Australian and American fighter force successfully attacked the less manouverable enemy planes. To use an American metaphor, it must have been 'like shooting fish in a barrel' as more than more than fifty percent of the Japanese bomber force was shot down. As a result, no further large scale enemy bombing raids were made during the remainder of the year.

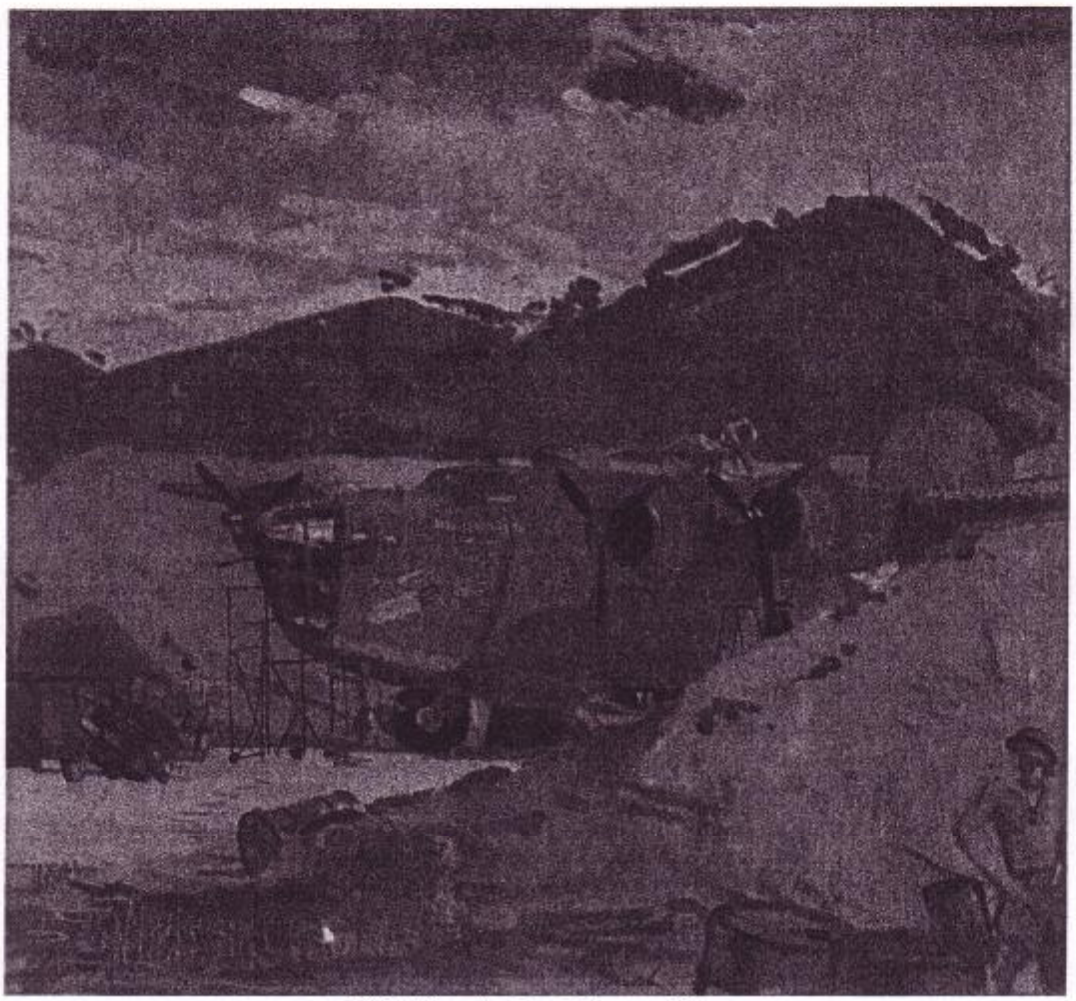
West Australian members of 2MWS, Wards Strip April 1943
(Courtesy of AWM #P01249.071)

In early April, we were advised that official photographs of the squadron were to be taken on Sunday, April the 11th when we were to be sure of wearing our cleanest khaki uniforms after the morning's church services.

A few days after the big enemy air-raid, I received a package from home. The parcel contained some small items of clothing which Milhad hand made as well as nonperishable snacks and biscuits. Accompanying these were newspaper cuttings of local stories in Perth and a greeting card as my twenty-third birthday was well nigh. With the birthday card was a small note which revealed the recent passing of my one remaining grandparent, William Henry Pearce (pictured right), on the 9th of April. He was 83 years of age. My thoughts of him were with when my birthday fell on Easter Saturday. It'll probably be the only 'time' during my lifespan that my birthday will occur on the Easter weekend.

From time to time, we organised games of social cricket, just to relieve the awkward mixture of boredom and tension. Having a fleet of earth moving machinery 'at our disposal', we were able to prepare our own facilities - no matter where we were! Sunday May the 9th saw us engaged in the popular summer pastime and in the course of my stint with the willow, I felt that I was batting well enough to attempt pulling anything short of a length - a reckless thought as it turned out! Sure enough, in due course, a juicy bumper presented itself. I wound up the bat and thought I had just about got onto it when I felt the ball (a genuine six-stitcher) strike me on the nail of the middle finger of my right hand. The nail rapidly turned black and the knuckle was numb. I considered that discretion was the better part of valour and decided to 'retire hurt', putting the incident down to experience. The

following morning, I awoke to the incredible pain eminating from my finger and after ablutions and breakfast, took myself off to the Medical Clearing Station (MCS No. 21), where an x-ray confirmed a broken bone. A splint was applied to the digit and this had a detrimental effect on my typing.



B-24 Liberator in a Dispersal Bay

Jubilant news from North Africa. Some 275,000 German and Italian troops have surrendered at Tunis. Eventually, a large proportion of these prisoners-of-war would be brought to Australia to be detained in widespread P.O.W. camps and made to work on our farms.

For most of the time, I'd been a virtual desk jockey and fairly proficient at it even if I do say so myself. Yet I still harboured a strong desire to fly, although I knew that my colour-blindness would prevent it. So one day, I made a submission through the CO, Squadron Leader Trewin to be accepted for pilot training. A colour-blindness examination was hastily conducted on me and somehow, I fluked a 'thumbs up'. All the relevant documentation plus a recommendation for me to be sent to the nearest Service Flying Training School, was sent to RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne. In the meantime, I set about bringing my fellow NCOs in the orderly room up to speed, so that they could cope after my likely departure for pilot training. About a fortnight after my application was sent, a reply was received by the CO who then had to break the news to me that HQ had answered by requesting a 'test again'

on the colour-blindness issue. So I tested again and not surprisingly, failed. I was philosophical about the failure, but it didn't dampen my enthusiasm to fly.

About the same time, it was discovered that colour blind people, whilst having an inability to distinguish differences in certain colours, were able to easily pick out camouflaged positions. So on most reconnaissance sorties, a colour blind serviceman would be taken along to assist in identifying enemy positions. As luck would have it, I was able to use my limited influence as a sergeant and got to go on a couple of these flights.

In the middle of September, our CO, Squadron Leader Trewin was transfered to other duties. He was replaced by our construction chief, Flight Lieutenant Bill Arthur who was simultaneously promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader.

One of Bill Arthur's first duties was to remind the squadron members about the promotion of personal hygiene particularly as we approaching the 'wet' season (was there any other kind in this neck of the woods?). 'were'

Unfortunately for me, bacteria seemed to make my digestive tract a major 'port-of call', so it was no surprise to me that I contracted dysentary in the second week of October. After being admitted to MCS No. 21 on the 13th of the month. I was held there for five weeks whilst being treated with antibiotics and a liquid diet - alas, not of the amber variety! By November the 17th, I was considered well enough to resume duties back at Wards Strip.

A few days after my discharge from hospital, more good news from the fighting front as American forces invaded and captured Tarawa and Makin in the Gilbert Islands located in the central Pacific.

On the whole, the Allied war effort was going well, with advances considerably outnumbering reverses.

Meanwhile, at Cairo in Egypt, US President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met with the Chinese leader Chiang Kai Shek to hammer out a combined military stategy to counter the Japanese 'Empire'. Against this background, with the Japanese retreating in the face of the Allied 'island hopping' campaign, the war front was getting further away from Wards Strip. We needed airstrips to enable our planes to strike deeper into enemy territory. To this end, the 2nd Mobile Works Squadron along with its companion 6MWS and 7MWS began preparing to move progressively to Lae on the north coast of New Guinea. By late November, our squadron was ready to mobilise all the plant and equipment to the Port Moresby docks where on December 2nd we were put on board two Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) (pictured left). Each of these vessels had a fold-down bow to facilitate rapid shallow water landings. However, the relatively shallow draught of these craft, whilst suited to sheltered conditions was less than desirable in open deep water. As a result, it was comparable to bouncing around on a cork raft!

The 630 nautical mile (1150km) voyage to Lae via the Coral Sea, Ward Hunt Strait and the Solomon Sea would take all of three days to complete. It was particularly hazardous given the season (the prevalence of cyclones) and potential enemy submarines. Whilst aboard the LST, I was assigned to the wireless section of the vessel in case of any inbound messages for the squadron that had to be typed.

This situation called for me to be quartered and fed with the Yank crew. So while the rest of the squadron had to endure sea rations, I was victualled with a virtually 'all fresh' food diet. No such thing as dehydrated tucker for the US Army - no sir!

On arrival at Lae, it was necessary to assist the No. 6MWS and No. 7MWS in establishing temporary facilities in the immediate area of Lae. The other two squadrons had both landed only a couple of days apart and less than a week prior to our arrival. Before we could get to our intended destination of Nadzab, some 18 - 20 miles (27 - 32 km) up the Markham River, the sodden connecting road had to be prepared for heavy traffic. This task was made all the more the difficult by the tropical downpour every evening at about 5 o'clock. It was said that you could just about set your watch by its punctuality and I began to think, 'It's a pity that the Perth to Geraldton train didn't achieve this high degree of punctuality!'

By December the 16th, the road was made usable which permitted most personnel and equipment to get to Nadzab where our collective assignment was to construct not one, not two, but four landing strips with associated taxiways and dispersal bays within a three mile (5km) radius. Christmas was a very much an 'on the run' proposition as we were operating on a dawn to dusk schedule to complete the job as early as possible.

In keeping with a developing custom, one of the first tasks in airfield construction was to create a cricket field from the rich reddish brown earth. However, with little distinguishing difference between the heavy rolled pitch and the leveled outfield, the chances of our working uniforms sustaining grass stains were somewhere 'twixt Buckley's and none! However gravel-rash was another matter entirely.

After settling in at Nadzab, a few of us decided to try some of the local fruit and get a bit variety into our diets. We noted that the paw paw trees were plentiful around our camp and opted to test our taste buds on this reputed tropical delicacy. However, harvesting the paw paws proved to be a bit of a problem as they grew at the top of a long tree trunk, much like coconut palms. One of our chaps piped up and said that he'd seen the locals clambering up the trees to retrieve the fruit. A number of our more athletic blokes tried climbing the trees but with their average weight being around eleven, twelve stone (67, 73kg) or more, the top of the trees would sway dangerously. So we had to convince our smallest chap (jockey size) to overcome his vertigo and bring the paw paws back down.

One's initial experience of eating fresh paw paw could only be described as - well let's just say that there isn't a better laxative anywhere. Fortunately, this effect wears off after a day or two and one is quite alright from then on. Suffice it to say, the thunderbox took a helluva bombing for a while!

Our Bulldozers at work

Through no fault of the paw paws, I copped another dose of dysentery in early February and was hospitalised at the No. 23 MCS at Lae for nearly a week.

As soon as I was discharged from the Lae Medical Clearing Station, the CO of our squadron announced that we were going to return to Australia within three months and that all of our equipment would be turned over to the other two mobile works squadrons. All of this procedure meant an increase of paperwork for the orderly room.

In early March, I was temporarily seconded to a detachment of pilots and engineers at the Newton airstrip, Nadzab. My role was to type the technical details and specifications of a proposal that they had been authorised to substantiate.

As the old saying goes, 'necessity is the mother of invention', well we had a real necessity! It was quite evident that our aeroplane landing gear tyres had a high rate of attrition, due to the less than ideal surface of the landing strips. Although given the available conditions, time and materials, the strips were as good as they could have been. At any rate, we were wearing out the tyres quicker than we could get replacements due to the scarcity of rubber since Malaya had been over-run by the Japanese. The engineers' task was to test the feasibility of any system which could pre-spin the wheels just prior to the plane's landing. This, it was hoped, would prolong the life of the tyres. I was only brought in if any idea sounded practical to submit to the senior ranks. Some of the ideas that I was told of were quite impractical, even hilarious. Just as one proven method was starting to come together, illness curtailed my involvement.

The month of April marked the beginning of the end of my tour of duty in Papua and New Guinea. The tell-tale signs of malaria began to manifest themselves in the first week of the month and by the 14th, I was readmitted to No. 23 MCS at Lae. Bedridden, I began to experience a fever that peaked every third or fourth day and unrelenting general muscle pain. With the peaking of the fever, one experiences the repetative unsettling sensation of cold shivering one minute then then sweating as if hot the next.But as long as one can't protect oneself from the ever-present mosquitoes, there is practically no avoiding malaria.

Within a day or so of my admission to the Lae MCS, I was dosed up on a quinine derivative called Plasmoquin, otherwise known as chloroquine sulphate. It didn't seem to improve my general malaise, as I was told later that I'd had an allergic reaction to the medication. Therefore, the treatment was 'modified'.

After four weeks at Lae, the medicos decided that I would have to be evacuated back to Australia on the first available air transport. My twenty fourth birthday was spent in a very listless condition.

In the meantime, my squadron had begun to prepare for return also to Australia and all but completed the handing over of our heavy equipment to the remaining 6 and 7 Mobile Works Squadrons.

I sensed that I was severing company from the squadron with which I had been since its inception nearly two years before. So strong was the 'esprit-de-corps' within me, I felt that a part of my body was being amputated.

Soon after being cleared from the Lae MCS, I was airlifted to Brisbane via Port Moresby and Townsville aboard a C-47 or Douglas Dakota DC3.

Arriving at the Queensland capital on May 21st, I was admitted to the No. 112 Military Hospital. Upon my admission, the doctor assigned to me, noted that I was suffering from malaria. I overheard him tell a nurse to start a course of Plasmoquin. I thought to myself, 'Oh no! Why don't they have a look at my medical records?' When the nurse returned with medication, I said to her,

"If that's Plasmoquin, I'll get an allergic reaction to it, just like I had at Lae. How about looking at my medical record if you don't believe me!"

"I'm sorry," she replied, " But your medical paperwork hasn't arrived. Look, I'm sure that the doctor knows what he's doing!"

I started to get upset at her stance.

"I tell you what", she said, "We'll just try one dose and see what happens".

Still inwardly fuming, I followed her advice and took the medication. Within twenty four hours the allergic reaction returned. After the doctor arrived, it was discovered that my records had miraculously tuned up in the interim. Evidently, they then noted what I had already pointed out. When I regained my senses, a nurse informed me that my medication had been changed and that it wouldn't happen again. No apology, mind you!

I was kept at Brisbane for a another few days for observation before I was considered physically able to cope with a further transfer.

It was during this spell that my former squadron had embarked at Lae bound for Brisbane. Alas, I had already been transfered to the No. 6 RAAF Hospital at Heidelberg in Victoria only a couple of days before they reached Brisbane.

It was fairly obvious, even to me, that I'd lost weight although I couldn't tell how much. Whilst at Heidelberg, a number of friendly but unfamiliar faces visited me but due to my poor state of health, it was hard for me to respond with much more than a smile or a nod of the head. I've no doubt that the visitors were quite sincere and well meaning. Then one day, some distant relatives who lived at Essendon, came to see me and chirped me up quite a bit. I think that the medical staff sensed this and initiated some moves to transfer me back to Perth where my closest kith and kin could visit me.

A few days before I was to be moved to Perth, heartening news from the war front in Europe was received. The long awaited Allied landings had commenced on the 6th of June - now known as D-Day - and one felt that the goal of victory was within sight.

In preparing me for the trip to Perth, I was formally weighed on some scales. My body weight was now a mere 7½ stone (48kg) - I'd lost 2½ stone (16kg) since my first bout of dysentery at Port Moresby, nine months earlier.

On Sunday the 11th of June, I departed from Heidelberg for Perth on a journey that would take the best part of four days. Thursday, June 15th saw me arrive in my home town for the first time in eighteen months. Despite my debilitated condition, I had a general feeling of elation. After being transfered to the ME 110 Hospital at Hollywood, I had a steady stream of familiar faces come to visit me and I felt that I was making considerable strides in my recovery. Gradually, my weight was gaining lost ground. Amongst the visitors I had were my prewar employers, Ernest and Sarah Harper. It was fairly apparent that Mr Harper's own health had suffered since I'd last seen him. They confirmed that it was due to the stress of trying to carry on the business without me and another chap, Gordon Hundley. Gordon who was about the same age as me, had also joined the RAAF at about the same time.

I was kept at Hollywood for just over four weeks when it was decided to transfer me to the No. 4 Medical Rehabilitation Unit at Yanchep. Being so far from Perth, meant an almost total lack of visitors for the month that I remained there. By mid-August, I had regained most of my lost body weight and strength, albeit, I suffered a mild bout of diarrhoea at the beginning of the month.

On August the 18th, Iwas discharged from Yanchep to the No. 5 Personnel Depot in Perth. I stayed at home for a couple of days before I was reposted to the No. 7 Communications Unit at Pearce Station where I was put to work in the orderly room. It was fairly apparent that I wasn't exactly going to be run off my feet - it was tame compared to what I'd already experienced in the 2MWS. I found myself scouting around for other work to do and I began to think that maybe I should apply for an early discharge, what with Mr Harper's ill health causing the real estate business to struggle. After due consideration, that is exactly what I did.

On October the 18th, I reported to the SSQ to seek treatment for wart type blisters on my feet. After some basic first aid, the medical staff issued me with a walking stick to aid in my mobility. On the same day, we heard via the news that American General Douglas MacArthur had stepped ashore at Leyte in the Philipines, fulfilling his pledge from two years earlier.

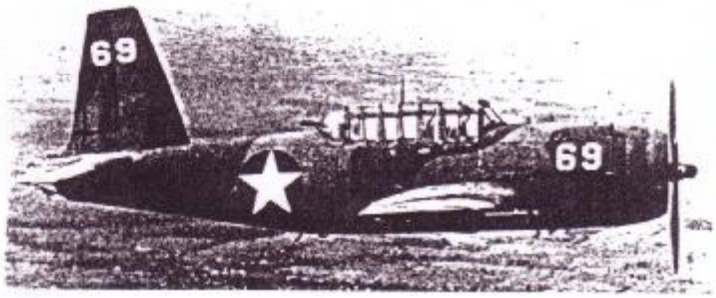
A couple of days later, saw the largest ever naval battle between an Allied fleet and diehard remnants of the Japanese Navy. The furious encounter took place east of the Philipines in a body of water called Leyte Gulf. For the enemy, it was last ditch stand from which they would never recover.

Meanwhile, back at Pearce, the brass had found another 'part-time fill-in' job for me - bar manager of the airmens' and sergeants' messes. From an administrative standpoint, it was fairly straight forward - just monitor the takings and audit and reorder the stock.

With my application for early discharge now submitted, I breezed through my work fully expecting an official recommendation for my request.

In early November, our unit was advised that we were to move to the Dunreath Base at Guildford. The shift took effect on Rememberance Day, Saturday November the 11th. Being now based at Guildford, it was now a whole lot easier to get home to Nedlands whenever I wasn't on duty.

About three weeks after the move, I received official advice that the earlier discharge application had not been recommended by the Deputy Director of Manpower at the Department of Labour and National Service, King Street, Perth. I thought to myself, 'Oh what sort of game is this? First they wouldn't let me be in aircrew training, now they won't let me go!'



A couple of weeks later, in December, after continually seeing or hearing planes almost constantly taking off or landing at Guildford, I rediscovered my desire to fly at any opportunity. I would pester the pilots if I knew that any planes were to be taken up for test flights or practise bombing missions and the like. On one particular occassion, an officer whose name was Frank Craig, was to fly an American built two seater light bomber called a Vultee Vengeance (pictured above). I approached him and asked him if I could 'crew' for him after his plane had just had some work done to it. He said that it would be alright, so I quickly found a flying suit which fitted me and presented myself to him and the aircraft. As we both clambered into the cockpit, I noticed a ground crew standing nearby with smirks on their faces. One of them yelled out,

"You'll be sorry!"

Not comprehending what the devil he meant, I self-assuredly buckled myself into the gunner's seat behind the pilot. My seat faced towards the tail, so both of us had to communicate with each other by means of radio headsets and a wire which ran between us.

After the pilot had started the engine and waited for a few minutes for it to warm up to operating temperature, he commenced taxiing the aircraft towards the top of the main landing strip. Using the internal communications, he asked me if I'd ever flown in a Vengeance before. I replied,

"No, I haven't!"

"Well", he continued,"you might find this interesting - to say the least!"

As the pilot manouvered the plane at the top of the runway, he opened the throttle which increased the revs of the 1700hp radial engine which roared and caused the plane to vibrate a little disconcertingly as we began to accelerate down the strip. In a moment we were airborne and from my vantage point the ground gradually pulled away. The pilot's voice crackled on the intercom,

"Well that wasn't too bad...but considering that we haven't got a full payload of three tons on board, it shouldn't have been either".

After gaining more altitude, he levelled off for a moment, then announced,

"Hold on tight!"

With that, he banked the plane to the right as I heard the aircraft creak and the pilot curse as he struggled with the controls to bring it back to the horizontal. After that episode, he went through a series of manouvres - turning, diving and climbing. With each turn, he asked me as to how I was feeling, to which I replied, with an upward inflection,

"Alright!"

After about forty-five minutes in the air, he said,

"Okay, that's it, we'll go back to the base."

Somewhat disappointed at what I thought was a shortish flight, I reluctantly agreed, as he pointed the plane in the direction of Guildford. He then confided,

"No wonder the Yanks palmed these Vengeances off on the Poms and us - they're a damnable piece of machinery to fly. You see, the problem is the engine is too heavy for the airframe which means that if you bank or turn too sharply, it'll drop like a house brick, and you've got to use all of your guile and skill to retrieve it !"

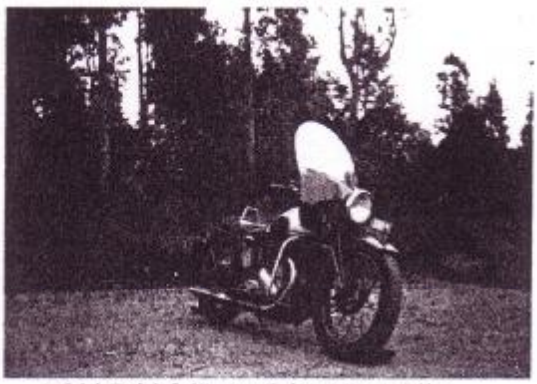
Indeed, it was a well-founded rumour that an American general had described it as ' a shining example of the waste of material, manpower and time in the production of an aeroplane which the Directorate of Military Requirements has tried to eliminate for several months'.

Having landed, we taxied to towards the hangar where we came to a halt. I clambered out as the pilot went though the shutdown procedure. Then as we both walked away from the plane, the ground crew were most perturbed to discover that I hadn't thrown up during the flight. I suspect that they'd 'run a book' on it.

As Christmas approached, I applied for and was granted a leave pass for the festive season - albeit just a few days.

Upon every home return, our faithful family pet, 'Muff', a kelpie cross (pictured left) and inveterate watchdog would view me with instant suspicion until he got a nostril full of my scent. Suddenly, with my identity proven to his satisfaction, he'd be all over me with his tongue going at nineteen to the dozen. Such is the unconditional affection of a loyal and trusting canine.

In keeping with every leave pass at home, I always tried to make sure that I spared some time to visit with my late mother's older sister. A single, senior school teacher, Frances Emma Metcalf or Aunty Frank as we affectionately called her, she had been both an inspiration and mentor to Roy and I as kids then in our youth. In Aunty Frank's chosen profession, periodical shifting went pretty much with the territory. She'd travelled quite extensively overseas and in her frequent correspondence to us, she nurtured an interest in us in stamp collecting, a hobby which would grow with me for the rest of my life. During the war years, she resided at No. 57 Daglish Street, Wembley which had earlier meant for my part, a considerable useage of 'shankses ponies'. But by now, I'd bought myself a BSA motorcycle. This made the journey from Nedlands to Wembley somewhat quicker and easier. However, there was never any doubt that my visits to Aunty Frank must have stuck in Mil's craw, so to speak. Borne of Mil's petty jealousy, this was the irreparable state of affairs between them.



"Old Faithful", my BSA Motorbike

Aunty Frank's, 57 Daglish Street, Wembley

1945

After a quiet Christmas and New Year and feeling that peace was closer at hand than ever before, work at 7 Comunications Unit, Guildford was fairly routine. It was a similar story as bar manager of the airmens' and sergeants' messes. In this capacity, an essential part of my job was to order the weekly supplies of beer from both the Red Castle Brewery at nearby Rivervale as well as the Swan Brewery at Mounts Bay Road near the city. Week by week, it was a never-ending source of curiosity for me that there was never a shortage of volunteers to accompany the truck which was sent to pick up the beer. Eventually, this curiosity got the better of me so I decided to tag along and find out what the big attraction was. After arriving at and backing up to the loading dock of the first brewery, the rest of the airmen got ready to jump off the back of the truck as soon as it was safe to do so. I was in the cab of the truck with the driver.

After getting out, I looked around and although I sighted our allocation on the landing,there was no sign of the airmen. I thought to myself, 'Why should I try and load all this by myself?'. So I decided to go and find where the crew had vanished to. It didn't take long. Evidentally, it was a practice of long standing for 'call-in' customers to 'part-take of some free sampling'. After rousing the airmen to hurry up and finish their drinks, I got them to go out and load up the truck. We then moved on to the Swan Brewery where they also had a 'free sampling' practice - surprise, surprise! When we got back to Guildford, I set about minimising the number of personnel to two, plus a driver, who would be required to go on the 'brewery run'. Obviously, I wasn't the most popular NCO around for a while!

Despite the unpopularity or perhaps because of it, I decided at the end of January to make a second application for an early discharge on civillian work-related and medical grounds (I still wasn't completely over the malaria). As I waited hopefully, work continued at Guildford without major incident through February and into March.

Meanwhile, on the war front around the middle of February, U.S. Marines landed on the remote island of Iwo Jima. However, it seemed that the closer allied forces got to Japan, the more stout the defences became as the Americans copped horrendous casualties. Three weeks later, during the first few days of March, word reached us to the effect that the American Air Force using a large force of B-29 bombers had destroyed 16 square miles (40sq km) of Tokyo and killed some 85,000 of its citizens.

March 22nd saw my second discharge application rejected and I could almost visualise having no civillian job to go to if ever I got out of the Air Force, such was the state of E. & S. Harper. Ernest Harper, himself had made strong representations to the Manpower Department for my early release.

In early April, we found out that the Americans, in a concerted push, had landed on Okinawa which was only 350 miles (560km) south of the main islands of Japan. The tenacious nips would try to defend Okinawa with no less 1,900 kamikaze attacks.

On April 13th, it was broadcast that the American President, Franklin Roosevelt had passed away. His Vice President, Harry Truman, was sworn in as his replacement. It had only been a matter of weeks since some of us had seen some picture theatre newsreel footage of a conference involving Roosevelt, Churchill and the Soviet Union's Josef Stalin at a place called Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula. From memory, Roosevelt didn't present a particularly healthy picture then.

Tuesday April 24th and it was my twenty-fifth birthday. It had been three years since I'd celebrated my birthday on Australian soil, but there was little time to celebrate - tomorrow is Anzac Day.

Into May and the British, it was reported, had captured Rangoon, the capital of Burma. Also, it was only a matter of time before the Germans would capitulate, having been surrounded in an ever shrinking piece of territory in Europe. Then late on Monday, May the 7th, the word was out ;it was officially confirmed that the Germans had unconditionally surrendered. The following day was announced as V-E (Victory in Europe) Day. Back at Guildford, with my bar manager's hat on, I was hard pressed to keep control of the airmens' and sergeants' messes, but we got through.

A couple of days after V-E Day (May the 8th), the 'bush telegraph' revealed that the wet canteen of the airmens' and sergeants' messes at the Geraldton base had had to be closed in the wake of Germany's surrender. It was reported that certain individuals had been spiking the drinks of female personnel. Such practice was known as 'leg opening'. For my part, I'd put a clamp on anything like that at Guildford, with a prior warning to all personnel - airmen and sergeants alike - that any 'hi-jinks' like that and I'd close the bar instantly! But at Geraldton, the NCO in charge of the bar had lost control and was relieved of his managerial duties. So far as I knew, he was transfered to another base. Consequently, without a bar manager, for the ORs at Geraldton, their base was 'dry'.

I had built a reputation as a responsible bar manager and was probably noted in certain quarters for running a tight operation. It was later revealed that the airmen and sergeants at Geraldton were constantly urging the base CO to re-open the bar. To his credit, the CO, Wing Commander Chapman resisted their requests, until they could come up with the name of a suitable replacement. In due course, my name was put forward, albeit without my knowledge or consent. Evidentally, the Geraldton CO did some checking and, to cut a long story short, eventually I was persuaded to submit a transfer request. However, I wrote my own contract, and laid down the law as to what I would and would not tolerate in the position of part-time bar manager. Largely out of desperation, all concerned at Geraldton fully supported my conditions. My transfer request was approved relatively quickly and was due to take effect a few days later. However, the prospect of travelling to Geraldton by the very unreliable train (still disaffectionately known as 'the Rattler') did not exactly enthrall me. As a sergeant, I knew that only train travel was permissable for all the ORs but I was desperate to get a quick flight to Geraldton. Therefore, using my good relationship with the Guildford CO , Squadron Leader Baker (technically, I was his secretary), I approached him with the relevant request

"Now Sergeant Pearce", he replied," you know the rules - I'm sorry, officers only so I can't authorise a flight to Geraldton just for you!"

Somewhat dismayed, I respected his decision but not to be outdone, I started working on another tack. The next day, I went before the CO and said,

"I'm still keen on flying to Geraldton as you know, so I've come up with a plan. How about authorising the Avro Anson to do a triangular practise bombing run out to, say, Mullewa then return via Geraldton where they could put me down?"

"That's not a bad idea, Sergeant", he replied thoughtfully then added, " but we're running a bit low on high octane fuel for the planes. Sorry, no flight!"

Again, I accepted his decision, but I wasn't finished yet, not by a long shot. I just had to fly. Using some inside knowledge, I went back to the CO the following morning for a third and, hopefully, final time and announced,

"As you know sir, I would still prefer to get a flight to Geraldton".

"Yes Sergeant Pearce, I'm well aware of your little predicament", he replied.

"Well sir, it has come to my notice, that the officers' mess at Geraldton have their own crayfish boat and through this they're able to have crayfish every second or third day".

"Oh . . . yeah!" he mused.

"So, I was thinking", I continued, "if you could allocate a plane to fly to Geraldton and request the officers' mess up there to have a few bags of crayfish available for the officers' mess down here, then maybe I could get my flight to Geraldton!"

Taking barely a second or two to consider his decision at the same time as he was relishing the thought of a crustacean meal, he announced,

"Sergeant Pearce - you've got your flight - be ready first thing tomorrow morning!"

Moral of the story? World War II wasn't fought entirely on a diet of bully beef, hard tack or powdered eggs!

Having got to Geraldton, I found that a few things had changed in the three years since my first stint. The No. 4 Service Flying Training School was in the process of disbanding and there was considerably fewer personnel around. They still needed mechanics to maintain the planes but hardly any pilots to fly them. However, the No. 47 Radar Unit was still in regular operation. My duties, therefore, were significantly lighter than at Guildford. My designated role at Geraldton was to act as senior NCO in forming the new No. 87 Operational Base Unit, which wouldn't be officially 'up and running' until the middle of July.

After quickly settling into the routine at Geraldton, I eagerly arranged to get onto the town's tennis courts where there was no shortage of potential opponents.

A few weeks later, on July the 5th, the Prime Minister John Curtin passed away. On that same day US General Douglas Macarthur announced the liberation of the Philipines.

In the meantime, back on the tennis courts, I felt that with increasing practice, I was beginning to regain some valuable form. My old touch was returning to similar to what it had been before the war.

A week later, the No. 87 Operational Base Unit was formally founded with Flight Lieutenant H. V. Shearn acting as its CO. This unit had a relatively small number of personnel and as such, my work load was fairly light even with the bar manager's duties thrown in. The balance of July and the first week of August came and went quietly, still not knowing for how long the Japanese could fight on for.

Then late on Monday the 6th of August, we heard that the Americans had dropped a single bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima killing a huge number of its citizens. The notion that just one bomb could cause so much devastation was almost unimaginable. While still contemplating this carnage three days later, the Yanks dropped a similar bomb on another city in Japan - Nagasaki - with almost identical results. We began to speculate as to how many more of these bombs the Americans had up their sleeve (it turned out to be nil at the time) but the Japanese weren't waiting around for long to find out! News of their surrender reached us late on the following Tuesday, August the 14th.

Hiroshima aftermath
(Courtesy of USAF)

The war was officially over and with its end was the task of reconstruction, rebuilding shattered lives and commemorating the dead. However, there would be a new world order inspired by the soon- to-be formed United Nations Organisation along with a whole set of new standards to be come accustomed to. On a more positive note, we looked forward to settling down, getting married and producing a new generation free from war. As far as possible, we would try to put the war behind us or as the late US President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was reported to have remarked,

"More than end to war, we want an end to the beginning of all wars."

From my perspective, I sensed that having had two applications for early discharge rejected, my prospects of being demobilised in the foreseeable future seem quite remote. I envisaged that with hundreds or possibly thousands of other personnel to be 'demobbed', my clerical abilities were going to be at a premium from the Air Force's standpoint. I was, therefore, resolved to this situation and braced myself for 'the long haul'. I didn't expect to see my own discharge until well into the new year of 1946.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my pre-war employer, Ernest Harper, had applied for my early release through a submission to the Office of Manpower in Perth. In the meantime, a bout of influenza in early October saw me hospitalised at the Geraldton SSQ for five days. Two days after I got out of hospital, I received the surprising news that the Air Force and the Manpower Office had already aproved my early discharge on the same day as my hospital admission - Tuesday, October the 2nd. Significantly, I later discovered that Gordon Hundley who also had worked at Harper's before joining the RAAF as an armourer, coincidentally, received a surprise discharge much earlier than he had anticipated. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility that as Ernest Harper had had a business relationship with the late John Curtin, his widow, Mrs Elsie Curtin, may have had a part to play in the probable 'string-pulling' at the highest echelons of the Commonwealth Government.

It was with a curious mixture of elation and melancholy that I prepared for my return to 'civvies'. Indeed, I began to empathise with two popular American songs of the day - 'My Dreams Are Getting Better All the Time' by Doris Day with the Les Brown Orchestra and also 'It's Been a Long, Long Time' by trumpeter and bandleader, Harry James with songstress, Kitty Kalen.

On the 11th of October, I reported to the SSQ for the unit medical clearance, my height being recorded as 5ft 10½ in (179cm) and weight - 10 stone (63kg) - now recovered from the significant loss the year before.

The fifteenth of October saw me aboard the train bound for Perth as I was transfered to the No. 5 Personnel Depot in Subiaco effective on Wednesday the 17th. Upon my return to Perth, I resided with Mil and Pop at 23 Cooper St whilst the final formalities were duly observed. On Friday the 19th of October, I was formally demobilised at the same time as my final Discharge Clearance Certificate was compiled. This procedure involved medical and internal debt (canteen and barracks store) clearances then accumulated leave and final pay to be accounted for. Finally there was the handing back of the rail travel warrant and service ID card. At the same time, I was issued with a civillian ID card as well as a set of ration coupons. My bronze, diamond shaped 'Returned From Active Service' badge would follow in due course.

I was now at liberty to resume my civillian pursuits free of any military encumberences. But I wasn't completely divorced from the Air Force's paperwork entanglement. In early November, I received from the Air Board at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne my formal Certificate of Service and Discharge upon part of which was enscribed my entitlements relating to Decorations and Medals. Having noticed that the Pacific Star was omitted, I wrote to Melbourne to point out the omission. From this correspondence, the Air Board

replied just prior to Christmas, asking me to return the inaccurate certificate for a true edition. Eventually, in early February of 1946, the updated accurate certificate arrived at 23 Cooper St, Nedlands.

By now, I was getting on with my life and about to be made a junior partner in Harper's Real Estate Agency in recognition of my firm commitment for the future. At the same time, I joined the Air Force Association, membership of which I maintained for many years.

Thus closed the door on my service to Australia's wartime defence.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

Certificate of Service and Discharge

Number 24622 Rank Sergeant

Full Name "TARC", Arthur Rowland

Date of Birth 24/4/1920 Date of Enlistment 16/1/1941 Date of Discharge 19/10/1945

Occupation in Civil Life Clerk

Reason for Discharge under the provisions of A.F.R. 115 (t)

"On demobilisation"

Character on Discharge V.G.

R.A.A.F. Mustering or Trade Clerk General

Degree of Trade Proficiency: A B SUFR. C SUFR.

DESCRIPTION (on enlistment)

Height 5'9" Colour of Hair Lt. Brown Colour of Eyes Brown Complexion Fair

Marks and Scars or Wounds Scar on left of neck

Qualifications and Special Courses No. P/1 Recruit Drill Cse. 14/1/41. 4/41 12/41.

PROMOTIONS, REMUSTERINGS, &c.

Rank	Date	Mustering or Trade	Decorations, Medals, etc.
Aircraftman Class1	16. 1.1941	Clerk General (iv)	1939-43 Star Ribbon
Leading Aircraftman	1. 4.1941	Clerk General (iv)	Pacific Star Ribbon
Corporel	1. 1.1942	Clerk General (iv)	87 O.B.U. 8/43.
Sergeant	1. 8.1942	Clerk General (iv)	
Sergeant	29. 9.1942	Clerk General (iii)	

Remarks: Qualified for a Returned from Active Service Badge.

Officer i/c records and date stamp. Royal Australian Air Force, Headquarters, Melbourne. 17th January, 1946.

K Bromilow
Air Member for Personnel

R.A.A.F. PRINTING UNIT — SEE NOTES ON OVER. — R.A.A.F. FORM A.F.B.31a, REVISED SEPTEMBER, 1945

My amended Discharge Certificate

R.A.A.F. CONCERT

TOWN HALL ATTRACTION

AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE

The Geraldton Town Hall was filled to capacity on New Year's night when the R.A.A.F. Concert Party conducted another of its bright variety enternainments. The decorations, lighting effects and appropriate settings served to completely transform the appearance of the stage, the arrangements for the presentations of the station's ten-piece band being an outstanding feature. The band included Messrs. Bill Dawes (piano), Jack Rooney, Arthur Pearce and Roy Roesner (violins), Roger Crook and Bill Willcock (trumpets), Allan Hayes and Aubrey Best (saxophones and clarinets), Syd. Anderson (guitar) and Vern Birch (drums and effects). The combination gave great pleasure during the evening, contributing several stage presentations and a number of accompaniments many of which made exacting demands on the instrumentalists.

The programme was capably planned and presented. The audience was kept in a simmer of merriment by the gags and diversions provided by the comedy team composed of Messrs. White, Vern Birch, Beyer, Harle, Wilson, Potts, Francis, O'Neil and others. Some of their contributions involved much preparation, a fact which the audience was quick to appreciate. Delightful vocal numbers were contributed by Messrs. Dick Francis, Jim Swaine, "Snowy" Cowley, Syd. Anderson and Reg Harle, whilst Ralph Potts scored with a monologue. Reg Harle's yodelling and impersonations were particularly well received. Mr. G. Wilson completely mystified his audience with his sleight of hand tricks. Among the many outstanding instrumental items were Terry O'Neil's mouth organ solo, Bill Dawes' pianoforte contributions, Arthur Wood's piano-accordeon items and two excellent violin trios by Messrs. Roesner, Pearce and Rooney. Every item was loudly applauded and the audience made insistent and frequent demands for encores, certainly reliable testimony to its appreciation of the fare presented.

(Extracted from 'The West Australian', early January, 1942)

ADDENDUM

1943

In the first week of September, massive troop movements by the Australian Army's 7th Division through the American Air Base at Jackson Field signalled a decisive forward push by the Allies. On the 5th of the month, the American 503rd Paratroop Regiment under Australian command had successfully mopped up isolated pockets of Japanese resistance in the immediate vicinity of Lae on Papua's north-east coast. The following day, General Blamey addressed the 7th Division as they prepared to be airlifted to Lae in a concerted effort to back up the US Paratroopers. Owing to an overwhelming shortage of transport aircraft in the RAAF, the USAAF was called on to assist in this rapid deployment.

In the early hours of Tuesday the 7th, a B24 Liberator Bomber being used in this action was taking off from Jackson Field, when it apparently stalled and crashed beyond the end of the strip. It was here that elements of the 2/33rd Battalion and 158th General Transport Company were encamped and awaiting their turn to be airlifted. The ensuing explosion cost about 150 Australian casualties including 59 dead. The blast was felt and heard at Wards Strip. A couple of days after the accident, I accompanied a number of personnel from 2MWS who were given permission to visit the site out of respect for the victims.

(AGP/HRP)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAHY

Australian Government Publishing Service — Units of the Royal Australian Air Force : A Concise History. 358.4009UNI

Gillison, Douglas — The Royal Australian Air Force 1939 – 1942 940.5441GIL

Odgers, George. — The RAAF: An Illustrated History Q358.4009ODG

Air War Against Japan 1943 – 1945 940.5449ODG

RAAF Directorate of Public Relations — These Eagles Q940.5449AUS

RAAF Log Q940.5449AUS

RAAF Saga Q940.5449AUS

Victory Roll Q940.5449AUS

Wilson, David — Always First: The RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons 1942 - 1974. 358.413WIL