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A Memoir – My Wartime Story.

Our family was huddled around the radio in Victoria Park, WA, when we heard the first declaration of war, later to be known as WWII. Our parents having lived through WWI were appalled that prospects of new disasters lay ahead. My mother saw the “war to end all wars” from London and my father saw it as a wounded Gallipoli and Somme survivor. Although Australian born, he enlisted with the New Zealand Forces because it was easier to enlist there. My parents were stricken that their two sons might be faced with similar war involvements. I was 15 and my brother 16.

When a mounted infantry unit was formed as part of the Civil Defence I proudly volunteered even though I did not have a horse. I thought I knew all about horses since my brother had kept one at our house and he had been a jackaroo up north. On Sunday morning musters on the Esplanade I would join the group and trot along side on foot.

Later, when I had bought a sail boat, which I moored, on the South Perth foreshore I was devastated when the hull was smashed on rocks during a savage easterly wind. My brother and I worked many weekends riding down to the shore on his motorbike and repairing the damage before we were able to sail up and down the Swan River again.

The river was fairly well known to us since we used row my grandfather all over during his fishing trips night and day. I also helped a friend and his father build a boat and sail to Garden Island. Thus having acquired some knowledge of seafaring and navigation at 16 I wrote offering my services under a nom-de-guerre to the chief of Naval Intelligence at Fremantle harbour.

A special name was used to conceal my secret identity from the bank where I worked. Needless to say I was soon located and interviewed by a kindly gentleman who explained that ONI or whatever, appreciated my offer but I should enlist with the Navy when I was old enough.

My brother joined up with the RAAF as soon as he was old enough. He told many tales of his activities in training as a pilot. The air seemed a wonderful place from which to engage in war and defence. Having made some gestures to helping the Infantry and then the Navy of the Australian Armed Forces I seriously considered joining the remaining branch of the services.

I joined the RAAF in 1942 and soon left by train across the dusty Nullarbor for Victor Harbour in South Australia for initial training. From my departure from Perth in those hazy days it seems my intellectual life as an internationalist really began.

It was my first time out of WA and from then on it seemed that I never stopped travelling or thinking beyond the local scene. My Air Force experience in the RAAF to me to Benalla, Point Cook, Mallala, Sydney, San Francisco, New York, Brighton, Windsor, London, Lincoln, Oakington, dozens of other airfields in England and with NZ and RAF squadrons (rather than with RAAF squadrons),

bombing raids as a pilot over Germany and France with the Pathfinder Force of Bomber Command, up and down the Ruhr, Potsdam and other targets, humanitarian drops in Rotterdam and rescuing POW's in Rostock at the end of hostilities.

When on base I studied French and German and read about international relations. I applied to be demobilized in France but without success. I obtained a UK commercial pilots licence. After returning to my bank job in Sydney, I took leave to study in Sweden.

I worked at the Olympics in Helsinki, hitch hiked around Germany, attached myself to a bank in Switzerland and London.

My Harvard University doctoral dissertation was on international investment; my books, writings and teachings have been on international economics, pacific basin political economy and administration in developing countries. I have worked on Inter-American Development Bank missions, and United Nations projects in Indonesia, Ethiopia, Korea, Ecuador, Iran and have been Visiting Professor in Holland, Sweden and Chile as well as Western Australia.

I have headed study programs in France and Sri Lanka. The early war-engendered-migrations certainly seemed to have had their knowledge-enhancing-dimensions for me as time rolled by.

Fortunately, unlike my father and brother, I was not physically injured or wounded from my wartime experiences. My father carried a piece of shrapnel and had effects from mustard gas, and my brother carried a DFC for his bravery from a mission which ended in a smashed landing on the coast in England and injuries to his stomach from which he suffered the rest of his life.

Avoiding bodily injuries however, does not mean that harm to the psyche is avoided. The remembrances of a cousin released from a Japanese prison of war camp with severed damage to his organs that quickly shortened his life, carries their own internal wounds.

Reliving the crash of a plane with colleagues lost; the sight of a smoking headless torso rolling across the field; the chilling feeling of an air raid siren heralding that the end might be in sight; the blast of bombs coming through the ceiling after they had been released by your bomb-aimer are injuries to the mind that is precipitated only by war and violence.

That is why most of us out of the war are disinclined to talk much about the war.