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## **Donald Wheaton Thorn**

Born: 10<sup>th</sup> August 1916

(Written by his daughter from Don's personal recollections)

I was born in Pinjarra, Western Australia, the fourth child and only son of five children. My mother travelled by horse and buggy the 20kms from our farm in North Dandalup to the hospital in Pinjarra for the birth. I grew up during the depression years after WWI and we did not have much in the way of toys or playtime.

I quickly learnt to help my father on the farm, especially taking my pushbike to deliver meat to the timber camps about 7 – 10kms uphill from our farm. I did well at school and was pleased to gain a Scholarship to go to Narrogin Agricultural College. At 13 I was about the youngest student there. I was Dux of the College when I left at 15, choosing to return to help my father on the farm rather than continue with my studies on a further Scholarship, as it was now the height of the depression in 1932.

In 1929 I was 23 years old and had full management responsibility for the family farm in North Dandalup. The farm needed to financially maintain my parents, my sister Gladys and myself. At that stage I had a crystal wireless set that I had built myself and we often listened to the news from Europe. The possibility of war breaking out was a major point of conversation.

When the war began most of my friends of similar age immediately volunteered to join the services. Everyone in the district had been required to register and there was a lot of encouragement to enlist into the services. I applied too, but as my aging father was unable to operate the dairy and run the farm by himself, under the manpower provisions I was required to stay on the farm to deliver meat and dairy produce for the troops.

On any farm where there was more than one child at home one of the children was required to stay on the farm. A number of daughters stayed to enable their brothers to be free to volunteer. Thus I became one of the few able bodied young men remaining in our district.

Consequently I took responsibility for assisting those on neighbouring farms whenever heavy or technical work was required. I used to help whenever someone needed a windmill built or mended and helped out with the late summer fertilising (super phosphate) on many of the neighbouring farms.

It was partly while assisting one of my closest neighbours with the haymaking that I became fond of Peggy Readhead who worked with her father doing the work of a man even though she was only 16 or 17 at the time. Despite the restrictions of War, we eventually decided to marry. I wanted to have a home of our own before we could set the wedding date, but few materials to build were available.

As lime was difficult to get, I decided to make cement bricks myself to build the house using limestone rocks from an area I knew about 10kms away for the lime

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to make the bricks and the plaster. Together Peg and I collected the rocks which I burnt in a pit and then sieved the broken rocks to form the mortar for making the bricks. With some advice and support from a brother-in-law who was a builder, I used whatever material was available for the house. The only glass and flyscreening available were previously used and the second grade glass wasn't perfectly flat so refracted the view when you looked through it. All the construction and household requirements had to be purchased or obtained within the constraints of the rationing limits. While the building work progressed, both Peg and I had still to spend a full day's work on our respective farms.

From the time the Red Cross was formed in our area I took on the role of Secretary keeping the financial records as well as handling all the administrative requirements. I spent a lot of time supporting the many fund raising activities the community ran sending many cheques to the Perth Headquarters.

By 1942 a Volunteer Defence Corps was formed in our district. We had operated unofficially for some time before that. We had an Army officer come to train us in the use of weapons, explosives etc, but we were limited to what we could provide ourselves (mostly single shot 22 rifles and some old 303's from the Boer War, or some 1914 vintage Enfield rifles) The local Rifle Club was revived and the Army assisted in upgrading the rifle range for practice. Of course many of us already had some rabbit and kangaroo shooting experience.

Each area "platoon" elected its own officer, and I was voted Sergeant. After the initial training every weekend, we were told to prepare the area for a "Scorched Earth Policy" in case of invasion and to put the mechanisms into place to create maximum disruption by destroying road and railway bridges and other infrastructure. Every bridge or important structure in our area had several holes drilled in vital positions in preparation for explosives should the need arise.

I remember there was an Italian POW camp in the hills near Dwellingup, not far from my district. I imagine most inmates had probably been workers in vegetable farms near Waroona where there was a large Australian-Italian community. Mostly they were employed cutting up timber to make charcoal. Frequently they would escape and we would be warned to watch for them. One time we found 2 escaped POW's crouched down cowering in a freight car at the local railway station, hoping to be able to be lucky enough to get into the city before being seen. They were unarmed and very frightened when we found them. We felt rather sorry for them when we handed them over to the Captain of our VDC Division to take them back to the camp.

In February 1943 Peg and I were married. At that stage I had an old A-Model Ford truck, which had replaced my first T-Model Ford Ute. But I borrowed my father's Renault to take Peg to Bunbury for a few days' honeymoon. All our family and friends had pooled their ration coupons together to help purchase Peg's beautiful wedding dress. There were hardly any dresses available in Perth to choose from at that stage. The wedding presents also had been purchased with their scarce coupons, or from people's own precious possessions, so we were very grateful for all we were given.

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It was so difficult to get together all the things we needed to set up a new house. We had to make do without many everyday items. Our first hot water system consisted of a large can set up beside the wood burning Metters stove with the water pipes set around the fire. Although we moved into the house within a few months, I didn't have time to spare to complete the finishing touches like plastering and painting the walls and weather proofing the verandas until well after the war.

Each day Peg helped me with the farm work, as well as the completion of the house. For the first few months we lived in a caravan until the home became inhabitable. On weekends I was always away with the VDC. I did the milking before I went and after I returned and Peg managed many of the other tasks by herself. This was true even after our first two children were born in 1944 and 1945. We were milking about 50 cows at the time. There was no power in our district but I had one of the first milking machines, which I had designed to use a combination of a water wheel and an old Ford engine. It also included a separator for the cream, saving a lot of time and physical labour.

The cream was sent in tin coated steel 10 gallon churns by train to Fremantle as provisions for the Service personnel. We also sent fresh meat. Most of our own food supplies we were able to produce ourselves. We caught rabbits and kangaroos for meat, were able to obtain honey from beehives kept by relatives, grew our own fruit and vegetables and made our own butter. However, sugar, flour and similar items were difficult to obtain. The children knew very little about lollies then.

We were very excited when the war was finally over. There was a large Victory Celebration in North Dandalup on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1946 at which I was asked to speak on behalf of all the VDC members in our area, alongside representatives of each of the other military branches. The school children were each given Victory Medals.

Finally over time we were able to obtain some of the supplies for the farm and the farmhouse, which we had managed without for the duration of the war. I was discharged from the VDC on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1945 and still have the Certificate I received in 1946 recording the official period I was on part time War Service. I am not aware that any other of my VDC comrades are still around to be able to record this story. I don't think any of the bridges we "sabotaged" are still in existence.

PHOTO COPY  
FROM D THORN

# Roll of Honour



## A.I.F.

H. ROYLAND  
B. BREEN  
D. BREEN  
L. BREEN  
J. K. GILES  
A. GILL  
S. HEDDERLY  
R. D. HOWIE  
F. JOHNSTON  
L. MARSHALL  
E. MARSHALL  
H. MATTHEWS  
L. OLIVER  
N. RAMSAY  
F. ROWE  
A. WARREN  
R. WATSON  
E. YOUNG \*

## R.A.A.F.

B. BESEER  
J. BROOKS  
P. M. CARMODY  
W. EDISON \*  
O. EDISON  
L. JACKMAN  
J. M. LEFROY \*  
D. MATTHEWS  
I. G. MATTHEWS  
E. S. PHILLIPS  
G. W. ROBERTSON  
K. SMITH

## Garrison Bn.

F. MATTHEWS †  
W. MATTHEWS †  
C. VINE †

## Women's Auxiliary Services

MISS C. BROOKES  
MRS. L. DAVIES  
MISS F. EDISON  
MISS S. DEWAR  
MISS B. MATTHEWS  
MISS G. MATTHEWS  
MISS D. ROWE  
MISS M. WARREN  
MISS B. WILLIS

\* Killed in action.  
† Served in World War I and II.

"Advertiser" Print. Pth/Jura.

## SOUVENIR PROGRAMME

of

# VICTORY

## Celebrations

June 10th, 1946  
North Dandalup



In Honour of Those Who  
Served

DANCING TILL 10 P.M.



Ceremony will commence with the  
*National Anthem*

**SONG.—RECESSIONAL**

God of our fathers, known of old—  
Lord of our far-flung battle line—  
Beneath whose awful hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine—  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies—  
The captains and the kings depart;  
Still stands Thine ancient Guardian,  
Ain humble and a contrite heart,  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Guest Speaker:

**Mr. D. R. McLARTY, M.L.A.**  
will be presented by the Master  
of Ceremonies.

*Roll of Honour*  
*Unveiled*

and the names thereon read out.

The following members have been  
selected to speak on behalf of their  
branch of the Services:—

**Mr. L. JACKMAN, R.A.A.F.**  
**Mr. J. R. GILES, A.I.F.**  
**Mr. C. VINE, 1st A.I.F.**  
**Mrs. L. DAVIES, W.A.A.A.F.**  
**Mr. D. THORN, V.D.C.**  
**Mr. P. M. CARMODY, R.A.A.F.**

*Presentation of Victory*  
*Effigies*

to children of North Dandalup State  
School

by  
**Mr. A. EDWARD,**  
Member Murray Road Board

**SONG—"LAND OF HOPE AND  
GLORY"**

Chorus.  
Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the  
Free,  
How shall we extol thee, who are born of  
thee?  
Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be  
set;  
God, who made thee mighty, make thee  
mightier yet.  
(Repeat)

Address by M.C.  
**Mr. J. L. HOLM,**  
Volunteer Air Observer Corps

*In Memoriam*

**W. EDESON**  
**J. M. LEFROY**  
**E. YOUNG**

They went with songs to the battle, they  
were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and  
aglow.

They were staunch to the end against odds  
uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall not grow old as we that are left  
grow old,  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years  
conquer them.  
At the going down of the sun and in the  
morning  
We will remember them.

—Laurence Binyon.

"Up to the Sight,  
to Memory Ever."