
Everard Owen Whitehurst

Born 17 December 1924 at Nabawa via Geraldton WA (story written by his widow).

Lived at Nabawa on parents' Charles and Hilda Whitehurst's farm property of 500 acres. At age of 18 years wanted to enlist in Army, told was needed on the land, so was knocked back first time in 1943. Later tried for RAAF, had to get Father's written consent to go. Enlisted July 1943 in Perth WA.

Life on the farm very hard, before war started, due to 1930's depression years. Family of 6 children and two parents to provide for, everybody who could, worked. Everard able to shear sheep, helped his father wherever he went and farm jobs.

RAAF Rookies training in Perth, Busselton, Geraldton bases mostly. Applied to do Flight Mechanic's course, trained at Perth Boys School, St George's Terrace Perth. Travelled across and back the Nullarbor by train from Perth to Melbourne (Ascot Vale) also Sydney (Bradfield Park) 2 or 3 times in 'cattle trucks' (open trucks with boards for seats). Later went Perth to East Australia by ship, sailing way down southern seas, well away from our coastline, this in case of any submarines!!!

He became a flight mechanic, rank of L.A.C (Leading Aircraftsman), worked on plane engines. Last trip overland was to Brisbane before embarkation overseas. Unfortunately didn't get to go with mates he was with. Someone in the barracks next to him stole his wallet, had to stay behind for a court case for 6 weeks after finding the person responsible.

Mates went to Borneo and other places. He later flew to Morotai Island 1945 where spent last part of the war there. Quite a busy island, one of the biggest air bases. Some of Japanese POWs were camped there, lots of Americans too on the base.

He was very apprehensive about going overseas to a place never heard of and first time away from his country but wanted to do his bit, at 20 years of age nervous too.

Came face to face with Japanese men, a memory etched on his mind rest of his life – have never forgiven them, or forgot. Stayed on Morotai Island 6 months or more, was there when the signing of Armistice happened. Living on the island, amongst all the trauma and the place and what was happening around him is something never forgotten. Rained all the time, mud and slush, mossies, constant wet clothes, trying to work on the planes was a lot to contend with.

On E day he was given KP duty (while there was a lull in his other work) to go and burn out the latrines with petrol. These were 40 foot holes dug down into the earth, quite a few in long lines. "Something" must have been left in one (possibly cigarette butt!!!) for it exploded right back up onto him, still had hold of the petrol tin and was burned from waist up (only had shorts on at the time) all over top of him. Luckily had the sense to roll in 6 feet kikuyu grass. His screams alerted another person, quite some way off who came to his rescue. Was taken on the back of an open jeep to the hospital. Doctors and nurses looked after him, he was put in solution baths, bandaged all over with only eyes and mouth, slits left open. One nurse told another one he was the **only** burns patient she knew of, to survive the degree of burns he had (second and third). After hospital stay on Morotai when well enough to travel was sent back to Australia by plane to Heidelberg Hospital Melbourne for rest of treatment. Whilst there was found to have an infection on his back, in new skin, so a swab was done to find had come home with a bug which lay dormant in him for a long time before came up with illnesses in latter years from it.

From Heidelberg when fit enough was brought back to WA to Hollywood Hospital Perth to finish recuperating. Later discharged to civvy life again 22.1.1946 and already a member of the R.S.L.

All this overseas experience had a lifetime change over him and never forgot it. Came back to the parents' farm. At this stage was very jaundiced (yellow looking) found it very hard to fit in again. Even old friends and relatives didn't want to know him, been away 2½ years.

To drown out trauma and stress he had been under, he covered it up with drink as could not talk about anything for a long time. Finally took up truck driving (cartage contracting) with one truck first around the Nabawa district for local farmers as a business. A second truck later with younger brother driving it, started him off with this work, till married eventually in 1950 and gave it up to share farm with his father. Later bought 2,000 acres at Nalbawa (further up from Nabawa) in the Chapman Valley area northeast of Geraldton to farm on own with own family.

The news of war's end moved very fast, from island to island, everyone was relieved, sad (for mates gone) happy, glad it was all over but faced with civvy life to come, a lot of emotions to contend with. Things had changed dramatically on the home fronts as well, nothing was the same again, felt a complete stranger in his own place for quite some time, hard to settle down.

One thing he knew, could never look at fire again without remembering what happened – luckily (and many many thanks go to the doctors and nurses who helped look after him to survive the ordeal) came out of it without any scars at all on his body and **very** lucky to be alive. His mates, joined up with (one his own cousin) all came home too. He lost track with 3 of them till his 70th birthday party in 1994, after 50 years, came together again, as a surprise.

Since WWII ended, he'd been a member of RSL Branches, 1st Nabawa, 2nd Northampton, 3rd (moved to Perth 1963) Rivervale, Carlisle till 2001 receiving a 50 year certificate as a member. Also held at Nabawa, President, Treasurer positions.

Even though was a member of the forces (RAAF) on his travels to various places people befriended him, took him into their homes, for home comfort. Lots of them took time to write and kept in touch while he was away which meant a lot and was appreciated.

The bug that laid dormant for many, many years (from the burns episode) caused him to suffer four major complaints in the last five years of his life, so he went through a lot more trauma once again. The type of bug won't be named here.

He was our hero to our families, and a wonderful man.

Mrs TJ Whitehurst, wife of Everard Owen Whitehurst (written November 4th 2005).

PS. I have just met another war widow (lost her husband a few months ago – who turned out to be in RAAF on Morotai and knew about the person who got burnt on toilet duty that day. We could have met up with him earlier!!