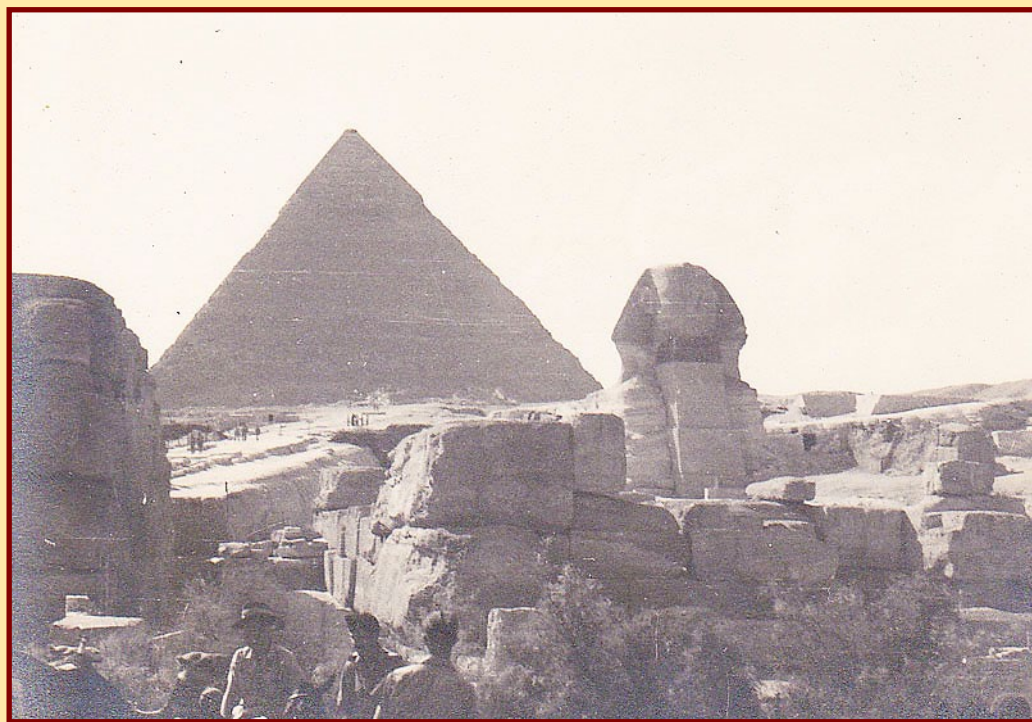


Back to *Jack's War* BOOK 1

3 Squadron STORIES

Jack's War – Book 2

29 October, 1942 – 27 September, 1943



In Egypt. The Sphynx at Giza near Cairo with the pyramid of Chephren in distance. Allied troops are in the foreground with what looks like a local guide – sightseeing? (Photograph in Jack's collection.)

Beach Burial

El Alamein, 1942.

Softly and humbly to the Gulf of Arabs
The convoys of dead sailors come;
At night they sway and wander in the waters far under,
But morning rolls them in the foam.

Between the sob and clubbing of the gunfire
Someone, it seems, has time for this,
To pluck them from the shallows and bury them in burrows
And tread the sand upon their nakedness;

And each cross, the driven stake of tidewood,
Bears the last signature of men,
Written with such perplexity, with such bewildered pity,
The words choke as they begin –

“Unknown seaman” – the ghostly pencil
Wavers and fades, the purple drips,
The breath of the wet season has washed their inscriptions
As blue as drowned men’s lips,

Dead seamen, gone in search of the same landfall,
Whether as enemies they fought,
Or fought with us, or neither, the sand joins them together,
Enlisted on the other front.

KENNETH SLESSOR, *Selected Poems* (1944).

29 Oct. 1942 **Almaza [a transit camp on the outskirts of Cairo]**

We're in Almaza, Egypt, waiting conversion to Kittyhawks. Ron Matthews, Tom Russell, Ian Roediger, Dick Howie, Bob Dent and Bill Leeds have converted and gone up to the Squadron. Pete Gilbert, Robert Ulrich, Charles Gallagher, Hawke, Knox and Weatherburn are going now. Jacky Beer and I go next. We drew for places. Conversion is done at El Ballah on the canal. A couple of hours doing fast wheel landings on a Harvard, then off in the Kitty.

Matthews and Dent got a bit of excitement out of it. Matthews was at 5000 feet in a Kitty when his engine cut. He put his wheels down and tried to reach the drome. Skimmed over a sandhill, hit the top of a ridge couple of hundred yards short of the drome and bounced right onto the runway.

He wins at poker, craps and the races.

On Dent's first Kitty landing he was travelling so fast when he tried to put his flaps down that nothing happened. He touched down at 200 mph, hurtled across the drome with a fire tender in pursuit, saw a bank and trees coming at him. Took off again and just cleared them. He went round again and this time got in O.K.

It's been four days since this push started at El Alamein, and the boys up there are toiling like Trojans. No 3's C.O., Squadron Leader Gibbes, got an ME109. The Squadron's 200th. Dent and Leeds departed for the front this morning on a truckload of beer ordered for the celebration.

RON MATTHEWS is standing, first visible from the left, in this photo of the squadron celebrating the shooting down of the Messerschmitt Bf109. His luck at cards, craps, and the races remained with him. After

No. 3 Squadron celebrating the '200th'!



Squadron Leader Robert Henry Maxwell (Bobby) Gibbes sitting beneath the board recording the squadron's score ('200 and still going strong') with pilots of his squadron during the celebration of his success in shooting down a Messerschmitt Bf109, the 200th victory for the squadron.

L-R Rear: Ron Matthews, David Ritchie, 'Huck' Finlayson, Andy Taylor, Doctor Stone, Garth Clabburn, Alex Richardson, Joe Holder, Rod Mackenzie, Ken Bee, Reg Stevens, Rex Bayly, Norm Caldwell (dark shirt), Gordon Jones (with cigarette), and Pat Henwood (ground crew).

Front: Lloyd "Danny" Boardman - Keith Kildey - Bobby Gibbes - John "Donk" Bray. (AWM SUK10410 1942.)²

beating the odds by flying operations with 3 Squadron in North Africa and Italy (and also instructing various training units) he returned, in January 1945, to the relative safety of Australia (safe if he wasn't testing Spitfires!). He was then posted for further RAAF administrative service in New Guinea.¹ Ron's luck stayed with him.

Sat. 31 Oct. 1942

Charles Gallagher is back from El Ballah. He's about the oldest of us – a slow, steady, painstaking bloke – and in spite of persistent efforts to become a bomber pilot ever since joining the RAAF, he ultimately found himself sitting in a Kittyhawk at Ballah. He opened the throttle and hoped for the best.

The next 40 minutes passed in a sort of a daze. Kitty flew him all over the desert and nearly into it. Eventually Charles got his breath back and landed O.K. But he'd convinced himself and the moguls that fighters were not for him and has finally got his recommendation for bombers. Looks like going back to Australia for his conversion. Well, they can't say they didn't try!

Sun. 8 Nov. 1942 - El Ballah [on the Suez Canal]

I arrived here a week ago with Bob Wardrobe, Jacky Beer, John Wells and Arthur Dawkins. Dawkins and I were given a quick whizz round in a Harvard and sent over to the Hurricane Air Fighting School on this drome for a week's good gutz [intelligence] from ex-ops, pre-Kittyhawk conversion. I'd flown only 25 hours in last 12 months and that was 7 months ago on Wirraways. Found myself up 5 times in a Hurricane first day. Whew!

On the first flip the undercart selector jammed so I couldn't get the wheels up or the flaps down. Stooged round a couple of times then came in no-flap and rolled right across the drome. The C.O. drove across and told me he didn't like it. On the next flip a tyre blew out on landing but I managed to keep straight. The Fighting School C.O. got shot in the head on ops and it seems to affect him at times – gets some crazy moods. Some mornings he takes off and beats up the drome about tent-high. Loves bawling people out full blast on the phone.

There's a Messerschmitt 109 here intact. 3 Squadron shot it down. The other morning the Wing Commander got in and took off. The glycol system blew up and an oil pipe burst. The cockpit was full of fumes and oil and the 109 hurtled round at about 150 feet leaving a long trail of glycol. The Wing Cr was blinded and had very little control. He finally skidded in

just missing some tents and a Tomahawk and got onto the runway and everyone breathed again.

Certainly looks a neat little machine. Much smaller than a Hurricane. Half the fuselage is engine. They heat up so fast on the ground they're towed to the take-off point.

Dawkins and I have finished our fighting course. We flew from dawn till sundown and seldom had time for a shave or shower. The rest of the boys started this morning.

Up at the Squadron Brian Harris has got one [enemy aircraft] damaged and some holes in his own plane. Sandy Jones has been shot down couple of times but still going strong. Roediger and Russell have started ops.

Howie force landed and was badly shaken.

Everyone is jubilant at the success of the current push. Huns and Ities [Germans and Italians] going right back where they came from. It's just a hunt now.

THE MESSERSCHMITT pictured above was found in the desert by Ken McRae and his colleague, Rex Palmer. It isn't the 200th Jack mentions but it's a good example of the plane. Having searched for a Messerschmitt to study, and found this one abandoned but in good condition except for a missing canopy, Ken commandeered it. He planned to get 'Black 6' back to the Squadron for Bobby Gibbes to fly and evaluate what the enemy was able to do with it.

Faced with stiff opposition from three army intelligence officers who arrived on the scene and attempted to take the Messerschmitt from him, Ken told them, 'No Way'. He had the aircraft and he was going to keep it!⁴

'You Beauty!' Messerschmitt found in the desert



*The Messerschmitt Bf 109G, 'Black 6', was found in the desert by Ken McRae.
(Photograph courtesy 3 Squadron website.³)*

This was the first example of the 'G' model of Messerschmitt captured in a flyable condition and it was extensively tested by the British. It survives today in the collection of the Imperial War Museum, Duxford, U.K.

Jack's Hurricane training, described in this entry, is colourfully reinvented as fiction in '[A Flying Fragment](#)'.

Fri. 13 Nov. 1942 - Almaza

Charles Gallagher went off yesterday to board a ship for Australia. He's loaded with messages for people at home.

Last night I went into Cairo with Ted Strom to buy a couple of leather straps. We called in at the Taverne Francaise for a few pots with Salvo. Fatal move! Embarked on costly and colourful cruise through Cairo; eventually arriving back with the straps and mafeesh filoos [no money].



The famous Mouski Market, Cairo, 1943. Crew of an RAF Halifax bomber on leave after spending eleven days adrift in the Mediterranean.⁹⁵

Sat. 14 Nov. 1942

A Blenheim crew flew past our tent to-day to say 'so-long' en route to the Blue [the desert]. Whizzed by head-high and we could see the pilot's face and a handkerchief fluttering from the gunner's turret.

A Wing Commander was holding a parade nearby at the time and made frantic efforts to read the identification letters. Nobody helped him out.



*A hot time in the old town ...!
RAAF lads enjoying a lively drink in a
Cairo nightclub.⁹⁶*

Fri. 20 Nov. 1942 - El Ballah

Getting in a few more hours on Hurricanes. Practising the tricks over the Suez Canal.

Two fellows collided in a practice dog fight. One had his tail smashed and bailed out. His Hurricane went in right by the drome. The other had a third of a wing chopped off but landed back on the drome O.K.

21 Nov. 1942

One Buxton took off on the reserve tank and forgot to switch to the main. Also forgot to check the switch when the engine cut out. He got back to the drome and pranged right in the centre, wheels up. Grounded indefinitely.

22 Nov. 1942

I was above clouds for a couple of hours. It was a pleasant relief from the sandscape. Some mornings we get up there early and the sun comes up and there we are cruising among bright red cloudy cliffs and valleys.

A pity our cine-gun cameras don't use colour films.

A bomber went in with a bomb-load. A huge mushroom of smoke rising out of the sand.

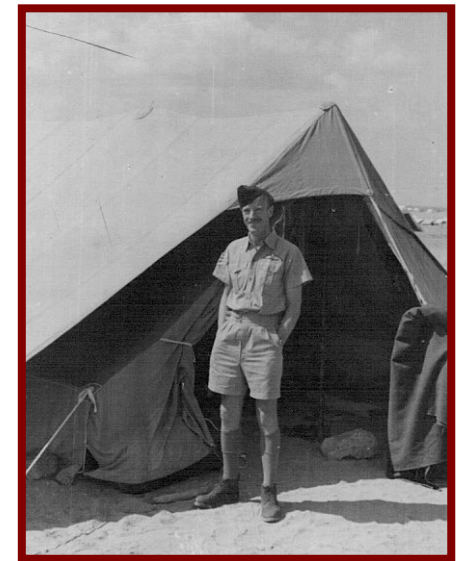
4 Dec. 1942 - Helwan [on the bank of the River Nile opposite the ruins of Memphis]

Sandy Jones has gone. His section was jumped and Sandy announced over R/T [radio transmitter] he was hit and going down. They saw him hit the sea with a hell of a smack six miles offshore.

Dick Howie's crash broke his back – he's returning to Aussie when fit to travel and won't fly for 9 months at least.

Brian Chatterton is in hospital with burns. His Hurricane sprang a glycol leak and caught fire and he tried to get her down.

I found 'Harbour K' in the Almaza mess the other night. I last saw him in Melbourne. He'd heard our party was skittled at sea. We roped in Sailor Griffiths and his Hurricane troupe – and there was wassail and song. Little 'Stickers' at the piano. He's a mouse-like creature with long unruly black hair and bright black eyes. Very musical and nervous as a kitten. Fighter pilots come in varied patterns!



Jack outside his tent – Helwan?

SANDY (ALEXANDER) Jones' plane was seen going into the sea west of Alexandria. Although he was thought to have died, Sandy was later reported to the Red Cross as having been taken prisoner by the Italians. He became a POW at Camp 85 in Italy then he was in Stalag IVB in Germany where he was rescued by the allied armies at the end of the war and repatriated to the U.K.

Although Sandy was in Stalag IVB at the end of the war he spent a period of at least four months from about February to June 1944 as a POW in Stalag Luft III which was run by Colonel Friederich-Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau of the Luftwaffe High Command. The site for the camp had been located where it was believed the harsh climate and landscape would make it escape-proof. Sandy arrived just in time for the escape of prisoners from the tunnel called 'Harry' – made famous in the film *The Great Escape*.

Fortunately, although he arrived before the escape, he wouldn't have been invited to accompany the escaping prisoners who'd been digging three tunnels since early in 1943. The escape teams were under the direction of Sqd. Ldr. Roger Bushell who had already escaped and been recaptured twice.

Of the 200 POWs who attempted to escape 76 made it out of the camp. Three managed to escape to the U.K., 23 were returned to POW camps, and the remaining 50 were executed by the Gestapo.

More details of the fascinating story of the digging of the tunnels and the escape written by Wing Commander H.K. Rees⁵ may be found at <http://www.ateal.co.uk/greatescape/>

Stories about a number of 3 Squadron pilots interned at Stalag Luft III can also be found on the 3 Squadron website.⁶

Commander Oberst (Colonel) Friedrich-Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau was a highly decorated WWI veteran and former member of Goering's personal staff. Lindeiner-Wildau was well educated, spoke excellent English and held the respect of the senior Allied officers in the camp. He had joined the Luftwaffe as it was the armed service most independent of the Nazis.⁷

Camp Commander, Colonel Friedrich-Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau.¹⁰



THE PAPER trail following Sandy Jones journey from No. 3 Squadron in the Middle East to POW camps in Italy, then to a POW camp Germany and finally to safety in the U.K. makes fascinating reading.¹¹

3/11/1942 – A report written by Sqd. Ldr. Bobby Gibbes, 3 Squadron:

Sgt Jones was a member of a formation of 6 aircraft from this Squadron, which with 12 aircraft of 66 Squadron, was escorting 16 Mitchells bombing the road w. of CHAZAL. Our aircraft engaged 12 BF109 [Messerchmitts] after the bombing.

One aircraft was seen to go down in flames during the ensuing dogfight and something which may have been an aircraft was seen to go into the sea on the way back. It is thought that SGT JONES may have been either of these...

8/2/1943 – The Letter to Mrs Jones after the initial telegram:

Dear Madam.

I desire to confirm the telegrams from this Department dated 29th January and the 2nd February, 1943, informing you that your son, Sergeant Alexander Norman Jones, was believed to be a prisoner of war, and later that confirmation had been received.

This information was first received in a broadcast from Rome and was later confirmed through the international Red Cross Committee. It is regretted that at present neither your son's place of internment nor his number as a prisoner of war is known in the Department ...

3/7/1943 – From AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY, BUREAU ENQUIRY

Service No. Rank Name and Unit. 401644. Sergeant Jones, Alexander Norman, 3 Squadron RAAF Middle East. Detail of Casualty. Reported P.O.W. (Date not advised) P.O.W. Camp address advised as Camp 85 PM 3450 ITALY.

18/9/1943 – Telegram from Air Force, Melbourne

FURTHER INFORMATION RECEIVED STATES THAT YOUR SON SERGEANT ALEXANDER NORMAN JONES' PRISON CAMP ADDRESS IS NOW CAMP 57 PM. 3200 ITALY.

26/5/1944 – Telegram from Air Force, Melbourne

401644 WARRANT OFFICER JONES A.N. PRISONER OF WAR STOP DESIRE TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON ALEXANDER NORMAN JONES HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED FROM ITALY TO STALAG LUFT THREE GERMANY PRISONER OF WAR NUMBER 225640 STOP THIS ADVICE IS BASED ON THE RECEIPT IN ENGLAND OF A PRISONER OF WAR LETTERCARD DATED 26TH FEBRUARY FROM YOUR SON.

29/6/1944 – AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY BUREAU OF ENQUIRY

Service No. Rank Name and Unit. 401644, W/O A.N. JONES. 3 Squadron RAAF Middle East.

Remarks: Previously Stalag Luft III, now at Stalag IVB, Germany.

20/5/45 – The final, surely longed for, telegram from Air Force, Melbourne

TO MR. J.N. JONES

401644 W/O A.N. JONES SAFE STOP PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON WARRANT OFFICER ALEXANDER NORMAN JONES HAS BEEN LIBERATED BY THE ALLIED ARMIES AND IS NOW SAFE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM STOP ANTICIPATE YOUR SON WILL COMMUNICATE WITH YOU DIRECT AIRFORCE ... MELBOURNE.

Then Sandy was HOME!



Stalag Luft III – Sagan, Eastern Germany

Stalag Luft III at Sagan in Eastern Germany (or Zagan, Poland, as it is now). Run by the Luftwaffe High Command, the site was chosen because it would be difficult to escape from by tunnelling. However, the camp is best known for two famous prisoner escapes that took place by tunnelling. They were made into the films: The Wooden Horse (1950) the The Great Escape (1963).⁸

Looking down a vertical tunnel shaft – Stalag Luft III

The Stalag Luft III 'Great Escape' tunnels and shafts were supported by boards from the prisoners' bunk beds to shore up the sandy soil. The escape on the night of 24 March, 1944 was led by Sqd. Ldr. Roger Bushell. Eighty prisoners made it out but only three evaded capture. Fifty of the recaptured prisoners were ordered to be shot by the Nazis.⁹



Sat. 5 Dec. 1942

Some of the boys who've gone out to the Squadron eventually caught up with the wing-base. 'The Squadron went that way,' said someone, jerking his thumb westward. 'Start hitch-hiking!'

The front moves west so fast now nobody's quite sure where it is.

A few of the boys pranged out there through insufficient hours on Kittyhawks and Gibbes is sending them back for more flying. He can hardly blame them. Long months cooling our heels in transit camps are a hell of a handicap.

Macdonald and I are the prize examples. We managed to get 3 weeks of flying in 12 months.

When you first take off after a stretch like that you wonder whether you still know how to do it.

Our R.A.A.F. Liaison officer out here reckons I should go back to Australia and build up some hours; but Wing Commander Judge at R.A.F. H.Q. is on my side and recommends that I stay here.

Here's hoping! None of us wants to go back to Aussie just yet.

JACK WAS very fond of Squadron Leader Bobby Gibbes. After the war Bobby flew Jack in his charter plane to remote places in New Guinea where, in 1954, Jack was a correspondent for *The Bulletin*. Jack had some very colourful stories about their flights – from Australia, across the Torres Strait to New Guinea and into the Highlands.

'He probably asked Jack to fly for him,' Tom Russell said recently as he recalled Bobby. 'He tried to get many of us to fly for him but we wouldn't. Flying through those New Guinea highland mountains and mists was too dangerous!'

6 Dec. 1942 - Helwan

I met a Wimpy [Vickers Wellington Bomber] pilot, Len Watson. He comes from the North Coast of New South Wales and knows my people there.

I went to the Taverne Francaise in Cairo with Ted Langford, a Wimpy observer from Malta. He had a message for a Middle East war-correspondent from the fellow's wife in England. Into the Taverne came a war-correspondent and Langford said, 'Excuse me, do you know Peter Duffield?'

The bloke said, 'I am Peter Duffield.'

So Salvo filled the glasses and the message was delivered.

6 Dec. 1942 - Helwan [continued]

Langford and I slept with some Canadians billeted at a hotel and returned to Helwan 24 hours AWL [Absent Without Leave]. We're doing SFA [sweet f*** all, slang for 'nothing much'] here anyway. He is flying to George, South Africa, next week to take a spell instructing pilots in General Reconnaissance.

Speaking of war-correspondents, why is their stuff so anaemic? There's about as much gutz in the average 'I Saw Tobruk' story as in a soft drink menu.

Tuesday 8 Dec. 1942 - 458 Squadron Shallufa [a base on the Suez Canal]

I left Helwan Sunday – spent a night in Cairo, meeting Jack Doyle and young Price, and on to Shallufa.

458 is an Aussie Wimpy [Vickers Wellington Bomber] Squadron. I haven't been able to ascertain whether I'm supposed to fly Wimps; but I believe the Air Force is capable of training a bloke for months as a fighter pilot to prepare him for a bomber career.

Good to get into an Aussie Sergeants' Mess again.

Ballarat Bitter!

Some of these crews have been out two and three years. We sank a few jugs of the B. Bitter and gave the boys the G.G. [good gutz] on Aussie. Plenty of questions.

It's only mid-day but from a nearby tent come sounds of a Bacchanalian fiesta. One bloke is going home. The rest do an op to-morrow night as usual.

My tent mate has just been raised from a bed of pain and Gyppo-gut to do a sub-stooge to Cyprus where 10 days' leave awaits the crew.

SQUADRONS NO. 3 and 458 were both based in North Africa. Although Jack was posted to No. 3 Squadron he was 'loaned out' to No. 458 Squadron which was based at El Shallufa in Egypt, on the Suez Canal, east of the Nile Delta. No. 458, an RAAF Bomber Squadron operating under control of the British, was one of several squadrons set up to receive RAAF graduates of the global Empire Training Scheme (although in practice it employed personnel of many different nationalities). Under the Scheme, Commonwealth countries agreed to train 28,000 air crew each year to help England fight the war in Europe and the Middle East. Australia, Canada and New Zealand provided more than half of the pilots and the RAF provided their aircraft.

In January 1942, No. 458 Squadron was relocated to Middle East Command from its base in England. From its base at El Shallufa, the Squadron was trained in techniques for attacking ships and submarines with bombs and torpedoes. No. 458's primary role was to seek out and attack enemy shipping in the Mediterranean Sea. Its aircraft went on to operate from many different airfield locations in Egypt, Palestine, Malta, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, Italy and Gibraltar. The Squadron also supported the Allied invasion of southern France in August 1944.

No. 458 Squadron operated until the 9th of June 1945 (the end of the war in Europe had occurred on May 8th, 1945).¹²

Jack's name appears as having arrived at the 458 Squadron base on page 72 of the Squadron's Operations Record Book.¹³

Thursday 10 Dec. 1942

With the 'Major', on air gunner wireless operation, I climbed into the cockpit of a Marauder. Talk about luxury! They're called 'prostitute' planes; the huge engines project on either side completely blocking any view of the wings, and from the cockpit she certainly has no visible means of support.

A couple of crews just came into the mess from a mine-dropping expedition to Tripoli. One pilot's flares were duds so he dropped a bomb to stir up some flak and verify his position. Apparently it fell in the sea – no result – so down went another bomb. This hit right on a drome at Tripoli and up came enough flak to last him for months.

Another bloke saw Ju88s sailing along beside him but apparently they were intent on finding their drome and landing, and didn't even see him.

Moments like these!



THE JUNKERS Ju88 was a World War II German Luftwaffe twin-engine, multi-role aircraft. The 'Martin B-26 Marauder was a World

War II, twin-engine, medium bomber developed by the U.S. Glenn L Martin Company ... After entering service with the U.S. Army, the aircraft received the reputation of a "Widowmaker" due to the early model's high rate of accidents during takeoff and landings.¹⁴

Sat. 12 Dec. 1942 - Berca Drome, Benghazi
[On the coast of Libya approx 1,000 kms west of Cairo.]

I came up here as a second dicky [second pilot] to Wing Commander Johnston to do torpedo attacks if favourable targets turn up. We kept out to sea on an anti-sub patrol all the way across, except for a mid-day landing at Gambut.

At Gambut an 88 came weaving across the drome just below the cloud-base – about 2500 ft. I took over for a while and flew a bomber for the first time. Strange after Hurricanes!

It was after dark when we crossed the coast near Benghazi and landed.

Some Aussie Marauder crews came into the mess tent just back from bombing barges – 600 feet in daylight. They're a mob of lumpy figures in fur lined jackets, with fortnight-old beards, babbling over their bully beef, dimly lit by a hurricane lamp.



Cartoon: Thumbs Up! (1941).¹⁵

A **AT THIS** stage Wing Commander Lewis Johnston, DSO (with whom Jack describes flying to Gambut), was in charge of No. 458 Squadron based at Shallufa on the Suez Canal. Historian, John Herington, has more information about Jack's flight to Gambut. In *Australia in the War of 1939 – 1943*, he writes that, in December 1942, 'No. 458 Squadron was still mainly engaged in training, but Johnston dispatched four crews to Gambut for operations ... This squadron had a particularly high proportion of Australian aircrew ... and these flew 34 of the 68 patrols sent out before the end of the year.'¹⁶

Jack's account of flying second pilot to Lew Johnston would have been on one of these patrols. Herington also talks about the *lost tribe* of Australian airmen, some 36 in all, who were scattered among 12 squadrons in the Eastern Air Command.¹⁷ Jack describes in a later entry the trouble he had trying to find his way back to 3 Squadron from 458 through the RAAF's Middle Eastern administrative chaos.

Sunday 13 Dec. 1942 [still with No. 458 Squadron in Libya]

We're camped on a grassy plain among olive trees. White buildings of Benghazi are visible in the distance. Beside the camp runs the Tripoli road lined with smallish gum trees, and on the other side are our Wellingtons, Beauforts, Beaufighters, Marauders and Naval planes interspersed with wrecked Messerschmitts, Heinkels, Savoias, Stukas and other odds and ends.

Every picture tells a story.

There is a constant stream of M.T. [motor transport] convoys along the Tripoli road heading for the front.

There is a possibility of attacking some shipping to-night. We've been briefed – round a mud edifice in a quarry which is the ops room – and are on all night stand-by.

ALAN STORR writes that 'Seven hundred Beaufort aircraft were produced in Australia for the Royal Australian Air Force from August 1941 to August 1944. The RAAF Beaufort was a version of the Bristol Beaufort, designed in the United Kingdom, but modified for Australian requirements.'¹⁸

Heinkels and Stukas were German aircraft and Savoias were Italian.¹⁹

Berca Airfield 1942 with wreckage of Axis aircraft and densely filled cemetery behind.⁸⁸



Berca Airfield near Benghazi, Cyrenaica, in 1943 as Jack saw it with 'smallish gum trees' lining the flooded road. (Photograph: L C LeGuay, AWM MEC1286.)⁸⁷



RAF Armoured Cars protecting convoys heading along the Tripoli Road through Libya towards the front line in May 1943. [These are ancient Rolls Royce vehicles dating from WWI.] (Photograph: AWM MED1426.)⁸⁶

Mon 14 Dec. 1942 [Benghazi]

Our torpedo attack didn't materialise last night. Some Jerry bombers raided us about 9 p.m. They lit the scene by dropping bunches of flares, and up went the Ack Ack. Multi-coloured Bofors [anti-aircraft autocannon] and even M.G. [machine gun] fire. The searchlights were feeling around for them. A crazy medley of sound and colour with the high, insistent drone of the bombers for a background. They were dropping mines and bombs on Benghazi Harbour. Two Beaufighters are missing on a daylight stooge to-day.

Dave Smith (the gunner) and I went searching for a couple of camp beds among the litter of Hun and Italian gear, but no luck. We saw acres of bombs and ammo and a huge dump of wrecked enemy planes.

There aren't many Benghazis about. A few potter round the camp trading eggs and tomatoes for cigarettes. They wear Italian tunics and tight pants and a red skull-cap, or, when the air's wiffy, a huge scarf in the usual Arab fashion.

A couple of kids who hang around the cooking trailer are bloody comical. The skull-cap, tight pants, bare feet, and Italian overcoats a mile too big. Daresay they've pestered the cooks of German, Italian and British camps with impartiality.

Friendly planes fly about tree-height around here. Anything high is suspect, and the Ack Ack gunners love shooting at planes.

A flock of old Albacores just churned past so low we could see the prop blades on the blue-green torpedoes slung underneath.

Tues. 15 Dec. 1942 [Benghazi]

There was an air raid about 5 A.M. 'Bags of panic'. Dave peered through the tent flap and gave a running commentary on the display. It was too cold to get up; but Al, our navigator, eventually turned out and stood shivering in his pyjamas criticising Jerry's flare dropping and 'running-op'. Quite a few bombs fell, but not near us.

Every time Jerry starts his run over the target the Bofors goes mad, literally, putting up a red and green curtain of tracer shells in front of the bomber.

Wing Commander Pratt and crew are missing from here. I noticed him at a briefing – a burly ginger headed bloke with a few days' stubble on his face. He was over Tripoli last night in a Wellington and gave his ETA Benghazi on the return trip but didn't arrive. We assumed a Jerry night fighter got him.

Wed. 16 Dec. 1942

We were aroused as usual by the Ack Ack and Bofors blazing away about 6 A.M. Still dark. A Hun was making his run right over our tents. Al shouted to the Ack Ack, 'Don't shoot now!' But everything opened up on him and the whistling splinters and shrapnel drove us into a slit trench we'd dug.

Al squatted as low as the trench would allow, holding a tin plate on his head because he had no tin hat, and said, 'I think we'll take another foot out of her.'

[The trench, that is.]

Passed unanimously.

Win, our Canadian ASV [Air to Surface Vessel Radar] operator, figures he's going to dig a hole to fit his head in, like an ostrich. Some of the bombs were delay, and blew up intermittently all the morning.

A gaggle of Blenheims, Albacores and Marauders went out this morning to attack shipping. We only work at night. At present our torpedoes are set for battleships – The Italian fleet may come out. Probably won't.



*Low Flying Vickers Wellington (Wimpy) in action.
(Photograph: No. 458 Squadron website.)²⁰*

17 Dec. 1942

Three Jerries were brought down in last night's raid. I saw one dodging like mad in the searchlights. It was the second raid at 2 A.M. They've sunk a ship load of beer and Xmas stores in Benghazi Harbour!!!

Al and Saggs the wireless operator want to man a Bofors Gun themselves to-night.

We went into Benghazi for a bit of Shufti and Klefti [looking around and possible souveniring], but there was little to see but debris and the souveniring infantry had limited the Klefti possibilities. We got some mess furniture and a few interesting little odds and ends. At the head of Saggs' bed stands an impressive sign in ornate lettering, 'Vice Commandante'.

And our tent is labelled 'Cabinetto' in chromium plated letters; but Dave suspects the word is Italian for lavatory.

Roy Spencer is reading aloud, with a wealth of histrionic gesture like a Shakespearean actor, a massive tome in Italian on the life of Bismark. Nobody knows what it's all about, but it sounds O.K.

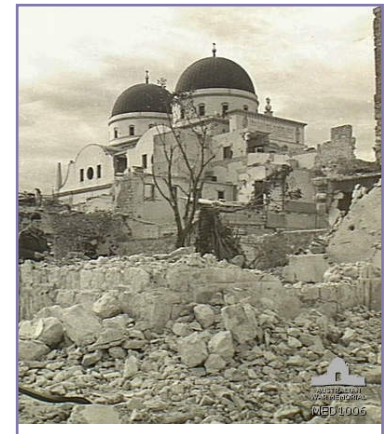
Roy has been mentioned in despatches.

Benghazi seems to have been a pleasant enough town. White, airy buildings, open squares, and tree lined streets. The only building intact is the cathedral, and this stands high above the surrounding ruins.

Apart from troops the place is practically deserted. In a narrow street lined with partially wrecked empty dwellings I came on an aged Arab street cleaner still at work. Not another soul in sight. Apparently nobody had dismissed him. Here and there an Arab kid ran beside



Deserted Benghazi. The main street in January 1943 was one of the least demolished areas of the city after two years of bombing. (Photograph: Frank Hurley, AWM 014232.)⁸⁹



Rising amid the ruins – Benghazi Cathedral, December 1942.⁹⁰

our truck holding out a salvaged primus for sale. For two packets of issue cigarettes you can buy one egg. For one packet, three tomatoes.

We've been briefed to stand by all night to protect a convoy coming from Malta to Benghazi.

THE FORAY by Jack and friends into Benghazi from the nearby Berca Aerodrome in December, 1942, was in the wake of Rommel's withdrawal from Benghazi in November 1942. Hence the scarcity of Italian artefacts when they turned up to see what had been left behind after the Eighth Army had taken the town several weeks prior to Jack's foray.²¹

18 Dec. 1942

A couple of shufti [reconnoitering] 88s came over in daylight this morning. The Bofors started yapping like a lot of dogs but didn't have a clue.

One of the 458 gunners, Pickets, was learning to fly with me at Camden, Sydney, before the war. We had a good old gossip.

The usual briefing this afternoon. Still a strange dearth of targets for our torpedoes. Dizzy Dean claims his are rusted on and probably won't drop when he does find a ship. Jimmy Mundy flew an op to make a strike off Tripoli only to find that his target was a wreck of some days' standing. Daylight found him just off Tripoli and very much alone – the predicted cloud cover not materialising, but nothing chased him.

Sat. 19 Dec. 1942 - Benghazi to Shallufa

Took off this morning in B for Bertie to sub-search back to Shallufa. When we got well out to sea at 1000 feet as instructed, the starboard engine became very, very sick. I went back and started pumping oil and everyone fixed on their Mae Wests – all but Al. His inter-com was bad and he was plugged out and dozing unaware of the situation. Someone plugged him in and shook him and the skipper said, 'Give me a course for the nearest land.'

And Al groped for maps and protractors and got to work igri [an Arabic word meaning 'fast'].

As we reached the coast at Mersa Matrak, Win announced from the depths of his ASV [Air Surface Vessel Radar], 'There's a ship 14 miles to port.'

He'd been staring at his screen looking for targets, but no-one else was interested.

We crawled from landing ground to landing ground but the engine didn't cut out altogether and we eventually reached home. I spent so much time at the oil pump I felt I was pumping the old Wimpy home like a railway trolley.

We crossed the 'cauldron' area in the desert at about 100 feet – a dreary waste littered with hundreds of pranged tanks, planes, armoured cars and trucks – wreckage from horizon to horizon. Not a sign of life. For vast desolation the Blue takes some beating.

THE CAULDRON refers to an area of desert in Libya south of Gazala and Tobruk where Rommel, 'the Desert Fox', began the Battle of Gazala on 26 May 1942. After securing the Cauldron following three days of intense fighting, Rommel was able to use it as an operational base from which his Italian and German forces could fight the allied forces.²² There are numerous photographic references to what Jack calls the 'dreary waste littered with ... wreckage from horizon to horizon' across the rest of the Western Desert. The allied counter attacks around El Alamein, including the Australians of the 9th Division with Nos. 3 and 450 Squadrons, were crucial to the British 8th Army's defeat of Rommel's forces by November 1942. The British General Leese called the Australian forces 'Homeric' in their fighting²³ and General Montgomery wrote 'the part they have played is beyond all praise'.²⁴ But the Battles of Alamein resulted in some 6,000 Australian 9th Division casualties and left in their wake that wreckage of war littering the lifeless desert.²⁸



Left: El Alamein area, November 1942. 'Burnt out German guns and towing tractor'. (Photograph:AWM 050011.)²⁶

Right: 'El Gazala, Libya. Wrecked and burnt out enemy planes. Photograph:AWM 022188.)²⁵



Marble Arch



German tanks recently arrived in Africa move through Marble Arch at Sirte in 1941 to re-inforce the Italians in the Western Desert. (Photograph: Moosmüller 21 March 1941.)⁴⁰



Royal Air Force: Operations in the Middle East and North Africa, 1939-1943

'Curtiss Kittyhawk Pilots of No. 239 Wing RAF report to their Commanding Officer's tent at Marble Arch, Tripolitania, after a sortie against retreating Axis forces in Libya. An ambitious plan, to airlift a whole fighter wing complete with necessary maintenance staff, equipment and supplies, to a forward landing ground in order to support the Eighth Army's most advanced elements in Libya, was carried out the day after the New Zealand Division secured Marble Arch on 17 December 1942.²⁷ No. 3 Squadron was part of No. 239 Wing and arrived at Marble Arch on 18 December. They left on 31 December 1942 to provide air cover for the Eighth Army as it pursued Rommel's westward retreat across North Africa.

22 Dec. 1942

Ron Matthews and Bill Leeds came to see me. They've done a few ops at 3 Squadron but have come back for an O.T.U. [Operational Training Unit] at Carthago.

Unfortunately for our health there was only whisky in the mess. The party went till about 3 a.m. and finished on rum punch in the Officers' Mess.

Dizzy Dean emerged at the crack of noon and explained that when he woke up he couldn't get his eyes open – 'I'd look silly walking about with my eyes shut.' So he stayed in bed.

Leeds and I are going out to Marble Arch or thereabouts to spend Xmas with 3 Squadron. He went on to Benghazi today and I'll pick him up there to-morrow.



No. 3 Squadron camped with other squadrons at Marble Arch. This photograph of the airfield was taken from the viewing platform at the top of the Arch. Marble Arch was later destroyed by Colonel Gaddafi.²⁹

AT MARBLE Arch No. 3 Squadron was further west than any Allied Air Force Wing had been ever since the war against the Italians had begun in Africa in 1940. Marble Arch (or *Arco dei Fileni* as it was properly named) was located on the main coastal road running beside the Mediterranean Sea between Tripoli and Tobruk. The spot originally marked the border between Carthage and Cyrene after a contest between runners decided the border in the 5th Century BC.

Here, some 1500 years later, Mussolini, while adding to his desert empire, built an arch over the road, adorned with sculptured reliefs of himself and grandiose inscriptions to preserve his memory. L'arco dei Fileni de Mussolini (or Marble Arch to the Allies) became a symbol of Mussolini's conquest of Libya early in the war and later a symbol of his defeat. In modern times it marked a major regional boundary in Libya but was destroyed by Colonel Gaddafi around 1970.⁹¹

In the hubris of Marble Arch there resonates an echo of the poet Shelley's reflection on the sand blown ruins of King Ozymandias's fallen monument to himself with the ironic inscription: 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'



Trooper on road surveillance with jeep in background.³²

Another outfit at Marble Arch that Christmas was the Special Air Service (SAS). These were commandos attached to the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). The LRDG was made up of free-wheeling troopers attached to the Allied ground forces and in 1942-43 they spent time around Marble Arch (Russell & Oglethorpe, pers. comm.). A principal job of the LRDG was reconnaissance and this included road watches.

Often in a two man team, 'the men would be dropped off at an observation site near the road, with a day's ration of food and water. Their first task would be to bury their food and water nearby. This hid the food from the enemy as well as helped keep their water cool. Located on the main coastal road between Tripoli and Tobruk, Marble Arch was ... the scene of the longest running and possibly the most important road watch established by the LRDG. Beginning in March of 1942 and running until 21 July 1942, the LRDG ran a continuous road watch five miles east of the arch. Each patrol would come out for an eleven day shift with ... a two man team watching the road for 24 hours at a stretch ... Reports would be sent back to LRDG HQs every night.'³¹

Tom Russell recalls a group of SAS commandos, bearded from spending time in the desert, and dressed like characters in a wild west movie, driving a jeep into the camp at Marble Arch on that memorable Christmas Day in 1942 (Russell & Oglethorpe, pers. comm. 2013).

Wild men of the Long Range Desert Group with Danny Boardman, No. 3 Squadron, standing back row, third from left – signature cigarette dangling from mouth.³⁰



Christmas at Marble Arch, 1942.

Xmas Day, Friday, 1942

Left Shallufa at 'first light' on the 23rd with Dizzy Dean and flew to Berca via Gambut. We lay about in the plane dozing and listening to Rome and German radio while Dizzy's crew got some steering hours in. I flew an hour or so on the last leg. I came in low over Tocra and sailed goat-high up to Berca staring into the faces of the startled herdsmen.

I found Bill Leeds waiting there. About 10 A.M. on the 24th I started hitching to Marble Arch. Got to Magrun in a staff car and while waiting for another lift I sat on a wrecked Italian piano by the road, knocking spine-chilling music out of it by belting the strings with sticks.

At Agedabia I found another 3 Squadron bloke hitching to Marble Arch. He'd just been discharged from hospital.

The road out there is pitted by mines and strafing and lined with wrecked vehicles and planes. A long rough ride.

The Arch itself loomed up about midnight. Somebody drove us to the 3 Squadron mess in a jeep. Festivities were still in full swing. Everyone mols [more or less] was there. Good to see the old faces again – Dave Ritchie, Brian Harris, Ted Hawke, Knox, Ian Roediger, Tom Russell and the others who'd trained with me in Aussie.

I was introduced to 'the Boss' himself [Bobby Gibbes] and made thoroughly at home.

Roediger did a good job the other day – he was cut off by 5 ME109s [Messerschmitts] and fought them for some time getting one 'damaged'. He returned without a hole in his plane. Finlayson, who went in to help him, was not seen again and presumed shot down.

Hawke skittled a ground machine gunner who was shooting at the Boss during an M.T. [motor transport] strafe, and Nev Austin knocked out an A.A. battery which was paying him too much attention. He dropped his bomb right among them. So the 'new blood' seems to be doing well.

The Boss led six Kitties over a Hun drome, and strafed it, burning 11 machines on the ground.

Rex Bayly got a slug in his engine and called up on the R.T. [Radio Telephone] – ‘going to land’. He belly-landed a mile or so from the Hun drome and announced on R/T that he intended to make for rough country N.E. and try to get back to our territory. The Boss told him to hang on and landed wheels down on a clear stretch a mile and a half from Rex, who, guided by the other 4 Kitties, reached the spot and the Boss took off with him and got home O.K.

Rude!! The Huns must be still in a fury over it.

We had a buffet Xmas dinner out in the open. Turkey, pork, greens, puddings and sauce and Australian beer.

Pilots and ground crews all ate together – a scrubby bearded mob in slouch hats and jack-boots – more like something from the days of Ned Kelly than the popular idea of a fighter squadron.

One of the diners was an RAF Regiment officer. They call him ‘Wild Bill Hickok’. Flat topped felt hat, long hairy beard, handle-bars moustache, revolver and knife. His specialty is driving into Hun dromes in an armed jeep and fixing time-bombs in the cockpits of their planes. He’s said to have destroyed 30 on one drome.



‘Christmas Lunch at Marble Arch Landing Ground’ with 3 Squadron. From the left: Danny Boardman; possibly Rod Mackenzie; Reg Stevens (centre); Rex Bayly (standing); Alan Righetti; Bobby Gibbes (looking surprisingly baby-faced); and Keith Kildey.³³

THE LUNCH of turkey and greens described by Jack is evident on Bobby’s plate while on close inspection it’s apparent that Danny Boardman is holding the beer – Ballarat Bitter! That Christmas lunch menu keeps getting better with Tom Russell and Alan Righetti’s memories of it included below.

Tom had arrived in the Middle East aboard the SS *Tanda* from Bombay a little earlier than Jack. Tom gets a number of mentions in Jack's journal and is very much alive and alert at the time of transcribing Jack's war journals. Tom remembers that Christmas lunch well.

'At Marble Arch,' Tom emailed, 'I spent Christmas Day, 1942, with some of the ground crew boys, including the ones who looked after my aircraft. Earlier in the month we'd lost five ground crew when one jumped off the back of a truck, onto a mine, and three of the boys were killed instantly, two later died, one in hospital at Benghazi, and one on the way to the hospital.' (Jack refers to this incident later.) The five ground-crew boys had been mown down by the German 'Bouncing Betty' or 'S-Mine' just a short distance from where Jack and the Squadron enjoyed their Christmas lunch.

Tom's diary describes a very convivial Christmas Day with the same dinner fare as described by Jack with the additional detail of 'two bottles of beer each' then a foray to Jack Pryke's tent where 'about 70 cans of beer' were downed; after which, Tom headed off for tea. Then on his return he fell into a slit trench occupied by 'some Scottish boys ... Lowell, Shoesmith, Walker and one other', who insisted he drink with them. Finally, having found his way back to 'Jack P's tent' they 'sang songs & told stories & finally went to bed at midnight'.³⁴ (Tom explained that, prior to Christmas Day, they hadn't had alcohol for five months.)

Tom's entry for Saturday 26th begins, 'Felt tired ...'!

After a day spent setting the tent to rights then chatting in the evening, Tom's entry ends with, 'Jack Lusby also spent the night in the tent with us.'³⁵

A third diarist, Alan Righetti, brings more to the table on that memorable Christmas Day, with 'sausages' with 'custard and jelly' added to the fare.

In his diary Alan describes a 'quiet evening in the mess' on 27 December with 'Jack Lusby, an Aussie Sgt/Pilot waiting at base to be posted here ... and as he is *The Bulletin* cartoonist, he did caricatures of Danny Boardman, Keith Kildey & Johnny Hooke. They were really good.'³⁶

THE BOSS', Bobby Gibbes, was a highly respected pilot and leader. He was a Wing Commander with a healthy disrespect for authority. His exploits as a courageous fighter pilot who later flew into the treacherous New Guinea highlands after the war made him a legend. In his autobiography *You Live But Once*, Bobby expands on Jack's description of his rescue of Rex Bayly.

Bobby writes: 'Pilot Officer Rex Bayly called up to say that his motor had been hit and that he was carrying out a forced landing. Rex crash-landed his aircraft nearly a mile from the aerodrome, and on coming to a stop, called up on his radio to say that he was O.K. His aircraft did not burn. I asked him what the area was like for a landing to pick him up, and ordered the other three aircraft to keep me covered and to stop any ground

forces coming out after him. He told me that the area was impossible, and asked me to leave him, but I flew down to look for myself. I found a suitable area about 3 miles further out and advised Bayly that I was landing, and to get weaving out to me.

'I touched down rather carefully in order to check that my tyres had not been punctured, and then taxied by a devious route for about a mile or more until I was stopped from getting closer to Bayly by a deep wadi.

'My Squadron's aircraft continued to circle overhead, carrying out an occasional dive towards the town in order to discourage any Italian attempt to pick us up. After what seemed like an age, sitting within gun range of Hun, Bayly at last appeared, puffing, and sweating profusely. He still managed a smile and a greeting.

'I tossed away my parachute and Bayly climbed into the cockpit. I climbed in after him and using him as my seat, I proceeded to start my motor. It was with great relief that we heard the engine fire, and opening my throttle beyond all normal limits, I stood on the brakes until I had obtained full power, and then released them, and, as we surged forward, I extended a little flap ... Hauling the stick back a small fraction, I managed to ease the aircraft into the air, but we hit the other side of the wadi with a terrific thud. We were flung back into the air, still not really flying, and to my horror, I saw my port wheel rolling back below the trailing edge of the wing, in the dust stream. The next ridge loomed up and it looked as if it was to be curtains for us, as I could never clear it. I deliberately dropped my starboard wing to take the bounce on my remaining wheel, and eased the stick back just enough to avoid flicking. To my great relief we cleared the ridge and were flying ... Luck remained with us, and we didn't see any enemy aircraft.' At Marble Arch, 'I made a landing on my starboard wheel.'⁴¹

Bobby Gibbes plucks Rex Bayly from a desert wadi



Bobby Gibbes with Dave Ritchie looking over his shoulder. 'He could read the desert like a road map,' said Tom Russell.³⁷ Here Bobby is seen on his return to the squadron base after being shot down in an aerial engagement with enemy aircraft. He'd spent three days in the desert finding his way back. (Photograph:AWM SUK10409.)³⁸



'View of Marble Arch from the West' by Robin Kay (1943).
(Photograph courtesy NZ War Memorial AAC898 NCWA 383.)³⁹

Sat. 26 Dec. 1942

Wassail again last night. I discovered Danny Boardman and I went to school together at Kempsey about 1925. We beefed out the football war cry to prove it. 'Watty' looked me up with felicitations from John Goffage of Sydney. Pete Gilbert wandered around this morning boasting that he'd seen me home to my tent last night. I spoilt the effect by turning up and reporting that I'd come-to on the floor of the Air Ambulance Unit's mess tent. Apparently we wandered away from our camp in the search [for our tent] and I got tired before we'd found our way back.

'Picking the team' is a great ceremony here. The Boss and flight commanders squat down at the mess table and select names for the next 'do'; and everyone clamours to be in it, as if it were a school cricket team.

Bill Leeds flew back to El Salam to-day en-route for the post at Kasfareet.

JACK'S FATHER, John Lusby, was the principal of West Kempsey School when Jack and Danny Boardman were students there in 1925. Danny, so called because of his renditions of 'Danny Boy' and other Irish classics, returned to his hometown after the war.

Tom remembers Flight Sergeants, Lloyd 'Danny' Boardman and Keith Kildey as exceptional pilots and leaders 'who boosted morale at all times'.⁴²

Keith Kildey described Danny as a 'friendly, unassuming, and a very likeable bloke' with 'an easy-going attitude which endeared him to all'. And as a Flight Commander, Danny was 'an excellent leader and a courageous pilot'.⁴⁵

Acting far above their rank of Sergeant Pilot, Danny Boardman and Keith Kildey led the Squadron into the battle of El Alamein in June 1942.



Picking the Team?

Sketch of Keith Kildey, Bobby Gibbes and Danny Boardman. Almost certainly done by Jack Lusby – Christmas '42? Image courtesy of James Oglethorpe.

27 Dec. 1942

90 percent of an operational pilot's time is spent slumped in a chair in the mess, or resting on his spine in his tent. Occasionally he kicks a football or throws a rock at an empty beer bottle. When not in the air, the life is one of extreme idleness.

Out in the 'blue' there's nowhere to go for a change, unless you visit a neighbouring unit for an hour or so. But those brief periods in the air leave their mark. Everyone looks ten years older.

Keith Kildey, a Flight Lieutenant with a gong – finished his time the other day, and is going home. Looking at him you get a shock to learn he's only 21.

The Huns have littered the area with mines and booby traps in their retreat. One burst under a lorry carrying eight 3 Squadron chaps, killing five. The others are in hospital back at Benghazi and Dave Ritchie flew down on Xmas day with their Xmas dinner.

A couple of other fellows ran over a mine in a jeep and were killed. So we still keep strictly to the beaten track.

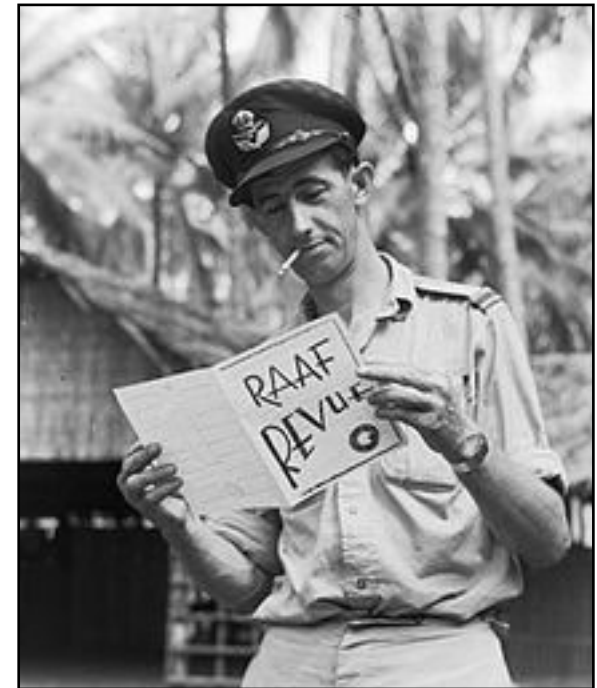
My leave from 458 Squadron is rapidly stretching into the unofficial stage, so if no plane is available in the morning I must start back by road again.

The Boss promises to do everything he can to rescue me from the present impasse and get me up here with No. 3. Here's hoping.

29 Dec. 1942 - Berca

I left Marble Arch yesterday with a drunk Welsh truck driver. He tore along, one hand on the wheel and one holding up a whisky bottle to his mouth at short intervals. Hit all the old bumps again. I slept in the back of the truck on outskirts

John (Chips Rafferty) Goffage



John Goffage who'd sent his 'felicitations' to Jack became better known after the war as the Australian actor, Chips Rafferty. Chips married Ellen Kathleen 'Quentin' Jameson on 28 May, 1941, then enlisted in the RAAF the next day and went off entertaining the troops. He was discharged on 13 February, 1945, having reached the rank of Flying Officer.⁴³

Photo taken by John Harrison, 1943. Now in the AWM collection with the title: 'Pilot Officer Goffage (better known as the actor Chips Rafferty) reading the programme for a review to be held at the RAAF base at Gili Gili in the Milne Bay Area'.⁴⁴

of Agedabia, where the driver found another Welshman in an army cook-trailer. We dined very well.

Came into Benghazi this morning – the camp a morass and the drome waterlogged. I brought back a Hun paratrooper tommy gun and a few clips of ammo. We cleaned it and blazed off a burst – perfect condition.

2 Jan. 1943 - Shallufa

I flew back here on New Year's Eve with Alec Barras. Ran into more festivities. Saw a few of our crews at Gambut waiting to do some stunt over Greece, or Crete.

Monday 4 Jan. 1943

Al, Joe Saggars, and Dave Smith are back. They did a bombing trip to Crete with Len Laver and got some Ack Ack holes in the plane. But no-one was hurt.

7 Jan. 1943 [Shallufa?]

I went up to Kasfareet the other day with Roy Spencer. Found Mick Shearman, Shannon, John Wells, Ted Strom, Brian Walker and other 3 Squadron blokes there – they've been ferrying Kitties up and bringing old stuff back.

Wells arrived while I was there – plaster over his forehead – he'd pranged an old Hurricane out in the blue somewhere on his way back.



3 Squadron's Danny Boardman D.F.M. (right) offers a ciggie to Squadron Leader Ron Watt (left) and Sergeant Pilot Alan Righetti at Marble Arch airfield, Libya, after they survived an attack by more than 15 Messerschmitts.
(Photograph courtesy of Alan Righetti.)⁴⁶



Flooded camp at Berca Aerodrome. The photo is dated c.1943 so it could well have been taken around the time Jack arrived back from Christmas at Marble Arch. The tents are beside a section of airfield heavy with water.⁹²

They've lost all their gear and have only the clothes they're wearing

Shearman and Shannon came back to 458 for the evening. They picked a good night for it. A truck-load of beer had arrived for the farewelling of several crews leaving to operate from Malta.

We eventually turned in at 2 A.M. It was the first Aussie beer Mick and Shannon had seen since Ceylon, so we made hay while the sun shone.

Next morning they buzzed back to Kasfareet. Their departure for Malta was delayed for a day, so the send-off was resumed about 10 A.M. and continued through the day and evening. During the afternoon Joe Sagers reeled out into the sunlight and discovered a squad of airmen lined up for rifle issue; so he tried to drill them. Dizzy went out to lend some assistance but fell over an oil drum and was carried back to the tent.

An expedition to the mess for another case of beer foundered half way back. Harry and I went forth and managed to pick the case off the top of them and drag it to safety.

Early in the evening Dizzy and Windy tried to start up an old Jerry prop [propeller] that hangs from the roof of the mess tent.

'Contact,' screamed Windy, and Dizzy swung with all his might. He brought down some Xmas decorations and sat in the tea bucket. When the unsightly appearance of the seat of his pants was commented on, he removed them and drank nonchalantly on in his shirt tails.

The party left a wide trail of scorched earth through the Sergeants', Officers', and Airmen's Messes, and died out about midnight.



An airman's time in the Middle East – sometimes! Libya 1941. 'A 3 Squadron cricket match in the Western Desert' (AWM 021899).⁴⁷

Dizzy didn't leave his bunk yesterday, and when he crawled forth this morning he found he wasn't going to Malta after all. Four crews went. Alec Barnes, Mick Moreau, Len Lauer, and Johnnie Pilcher.

Jimmy Munday had a propeller drop off over the Red Sea last night. Got back here but pranged on landing. No-one hurt.

Our own light Ack Ack opened up on the Wing Commander last night and was uncomfortably close.

458 Squadron is doing another raid on Crete to-night.

LIKE JACK, Roy Spencer was one of the many Australian airmen seconded to the RAF's No. 458 Squadron with its multi-national pool of airmen. As mentioned previously, Australian airmen were posted with 458 to meet Australia's obligation to provide British squadrons with pilots. This was in return for the pilot training bases Britain funded in Australia from 1940-1944 under the Empire Air Training Scheme.⁴⁹

Mon. 11 Jan. 1943 [Shallufa?]

Al Burns, Dave Smith, Saggs, Lou Laver and Ben Shearer have been killed on an op from Malta. Everyone's feeling pretty low about it. Bertie and I have been sending out Dave and Saggs' gear. If I hadn't been up at Marble Arch when that stunt was organised I'd have been still in that crew.

Xmas cakes and gifts arrived for Dave, Al, and Saggs to-day.

Yesterday I visited Shearman and Co. at Kasfareet again. Bob Wardrobe has been missing for 10 days on a ferry job.



*Western Desert 1941. 'There isn't much to do between patrols'. The player facing camera is Squadron Leader, Peter Jeffery.
(Photographer: G Silk, AWM 010186.)⁴⁸*

Bob Dent is in hospital in Benghazi with a broken neck.
Cooper is also in hospital – a car smash.

Tues. 12 Jan. 1943

My future seems a bit uncertain at present. I can't stay here with 458 Squadron as it's under RAF, though it has mostly Aussie personnel.

I haven't been on bombers.

W/C Judge and 'Gibby' of 3 Squadron favour me doing fighter O.T.U. at Carthago [in Sudan] and joining No. 3; but Australian liaison officer W/C Duncan has listed me to go back to Australia.

I saw him and told him of Judge's and Gibby's attitude – Judge had a go at him personally – but old Dunc adopted a 'maleesh' [never mind] attitude, achieved apparently by patient study of the Egyptians over a period of years, and saw no reason why he should do anything about it.

Gibbes has promised to try and straighten the matter out but time is getting short. Jack Bond tells me there's a ship going in a week or two.

I first struck Bond in the Taverne Francaise, Cairo. He had his head and half his body in plaster and looked like a petrified Arab. He'd force landed a Wimpy at night and it dropped into a gully killing most of the crew and breaking his own neck. His head was out so he could peer ahead into the darkness, and the window slid forward and cracked him like a guillotine. He's out of the plaster now, but won't fly for a couple of months yet. He's going back to Australia.



Air crew outside a tent in Egypt. Jack is far left (hair standing up like the crest of feathers he so often drew in his bird cartoons). He was right about the pilots looking 'ten years older'. Jack was 29 when this photo was taken but looks more like 40.

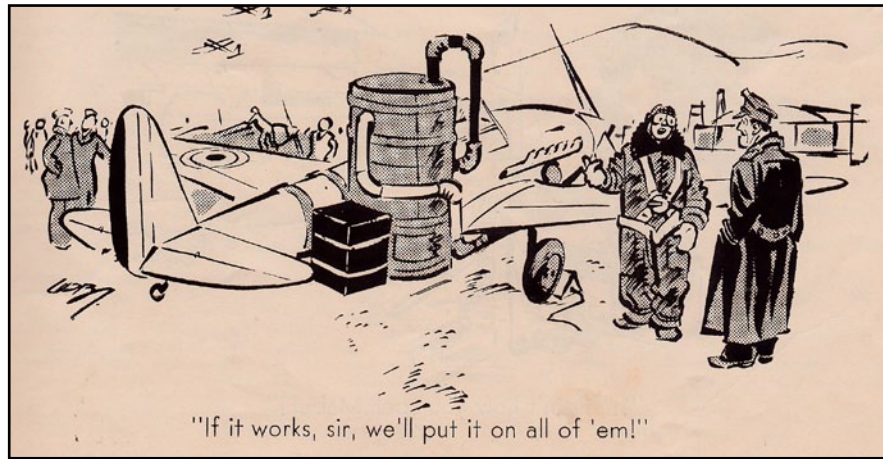
Thurs. 14 Jan. 1943

One of our Wimpies and a Beaufort went into the ditch last night. The Beaufort crew was picked up but no trace of ours yet.

Fri 15 Jan. 1943

The missing [Wimpy] crew turned up. They spent night in the dinghy and were picked up in the morning by an 11,000 ton merchant ship approaching Suez. The captain gave them a generous brandy and bacon and eggs for breakfast. They're back here now and O.K.

Roy Spencer saw the Very [flare gun] they fired after ditching and dropped flares which brought about the immediate rescue of the Beaufort crew which had crashed simultaneously. Not knowing there were two planes down, Roy said, 'Well that's that,' and buzzed off leaving our own blokes in the water.



Cartoon: Thumbs Up! (1941).⁵⁰

ROY SPENCER was still posted with No. 458 Squadron when he went down in a Wellington aircraft off the east coast of Italy in August, 1943.⁵¹

17 Jan. 1943

The C.O., the doc, and others came into our mess last night and let their hair down. During the proceedings someone said, 'Come on out and see the lovely fire!'

It was a Wimpy burning on the runway. Later a Beaufort crashed into it on landing. We're co-operating nicely with the Beauforts lately.

A Jerry Focke-Wulf Condor flew over us during the afternoon at about 25,000 ft. Such a huge plane. It stood out very clearly in silver against the blue sky.

Sunday 18 Jan. 1943

More crews went to Malta this morning. Dizzy Dean was among these.

Dizzy was in his Axis-bashing rig with a hip howitzer and a bottle of whisky. Ace and Woozlie – his navigator and wireless op – were similarly accoutred.

He took 'Butch' our flight sergeant storeman along. Butch, very excited at the prospect of serving on Malta, and weighed down with a parachute, a Mae West [life jacket], a 'K' dinghy, and other escape kit, was firing off questions as to what action to take in the event of ditching, being shot down, catching fire, or landing in enemy territory en-route to the island.

THE ENEMY forces were often referred to as the Axis or the alignment of great powers fighting against the Allies in World War II. The Axis included Germany, Italy and Japan.⁵³ In this instance Dizzy Dean would have had Germans and Italians in mind when he geared up in his 'Axis-bashing rig'.



Group portrait of members of No. 3 Squadron RAAF in front of their Curtiss P.40 Kittyhawk aircraft.

Left to right, back row (standing):

Pilot Officer (PO) John Hooke; Flight Sergeant Ted Hankey; Squadron Leader Reg Stevens; Flight Lieutenant Brian Harris; Flight Lieutenant Ian Roediger; George Hardiman; Flying Officer Jack Doyle.

Sitting on main plane:

K. Goulder; Flt Sgt Neil Funston; Sergeant Jack Beer; Warrant Officer Rex (or Reg) Laver.

Front row (squatting):

Flt Lt Murray Nash; PO Jack Sergeant; Flt Sgt Peter Gilbert; Flt Sgt Arthur Collier; FO Tom Russell. (Photographer L C Le Guay AWM MEC2292.)⁵²

Wed. 20 Jan. 1943

Ian Roediger has been shot down but got home O.K. apart from shrapnel in his leg.

He got a Heinkel and made the mistake of following it down. A couple of M.E.s [Messerschmitts] jumped him. Roediger pulled up and headed for what looked like the rest of the squadron up in the sun. Arriving among them he found them to be the rest of the M.E.s. One set him on fire and he jumped out.

The M.E. came at him as he dangled under the chute, and expecting to be finished off, Roediger pretended to be dead. The Jerry passed so close Roediger could see the expression on his face – and his ginger moustache. The M.E. kept circling, and, getting sick of the act, Roediger waved. The M.E. bored in at him again but still no bullets.

Roediger reached the deck and stood up. The M.E. dived at him and he thought – this is it anyway, but the M.E. flashed past him and pulled up into the blue and buzzed off. He'd just been seeing him down.

An Arab appeared, and seeing distant tanks they both hid in a ditch. The shrapnel in his leg was hurting so R decided to risk the tanks being Jerry and the Arab helped him across to them. They were ours.

JACK SPOKE about the kindness shown by the desert Arabs to allied airmen whose planes had come down. There was an arrangement whereby the Arabs were only obliged to provide the rescued servicemen with camel or goat's milk and dates while taking them to the safety of the allies who in return paid them for each serviceman they brought in.

A story by Flt Lt Dave Ritchie supports this. Having been shot down by two Messerschmitts in the Libyan desert Dave Ritchie was rescued by a young Arab who took him to a large Bedouin



San Angelo, Italy c. May 1944. Informal portrait of Flight Lieutenant Ian Roediger of Nhill, Victoria. He was a flight commander with No. 3 Squadron RAAF, when he took part in operations against the Germans in the Florence, Italy. Note the Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft behind him. (Photographer L.C. Le Guay, AWM MEA1895.)⁵⁴

encampment. Here the boy's father, a Sheik called Saad, offered Dave traditional Arabic hospitality. The good carpet was rolled out in the tent and Dave was given hot, sweet tea. After their ceremonial tea the old Sheik loaded Dave onto a donkey and under cover of darkness escorted him (at great risk) to an AIF camp. As they travelled through the night the old Sheik kept calling out, 'David ... David,' to keep the airman awake and encourage him to keep going.

DAVE RITCHIE recalls his rescue by the Arabs:

'I felt really grateful to old Saad and felt I owed him a great deal. I gave each of them a chit on which I'd written words to the effect that they had done me a great service and I wished that they should be given plenty of tea and sugar plus some money. I said goodbye to them and felt sorry to see the last of the men who had looked after me so well. I got the feeling that they would be glad to see me again anytime.

'We left then in a jeep for 3 Squadron RAAF and after five hours travelling over rough roads going as fast as possible, we arrived back at the Squadron. I called at the Operations truck and told them to let Wing know I was back. I drove to the mess and was just stepping out when someone called out, "Look who's here!" And the chaps rushed out and congratulated me on being back, making me feel as though I was really welcome and they really were glad to see me back. This was 2.30pm.

'I was relieved to be back after all the strain, and so glad to see all the chaps and the old mess, that I couldn't say anything because I wanted to have a good cry. I had tears in my eyes and could only rush in to buy a drink to dodge the moment.'⁵⁴



Not everyone had Dave's luck!

*Flight Sergeant R Warwick of the RAAF, Adelaide, SA. was posted with No. 458 Squadron. He was one of six crew members in a British Bomber shot down 17 miles west of Tobruk in September, 1942. Then he and three others trekked for 22 days through desert enemy country subsisting on malted milk tablets and whatever they could find until they reached the Allied lines.'*⁵⁶

*Flight Sergeant Warwick of South Australia.
(Photograph and caption: AWM 041989, 1942.)*⁵⁵

GROUP CAPTAIN Brian Eaton, who was Commanding Officer of No. 3 Squadron in North Africa in 1942/43, had a similar experience to Dave Ritchie's rescue by Arabs in the desert. In an interview recorded by Edward Stokes, Brian Eaton told of being found and rescued in the desert by Arabs. Much to his relief they were Senussi Arabs rather than Berbers who, he had been told, 'would cut your balls out and sew 'em in your mouth'.⁸²



An informal portrait of Brian Eaton as Commanding Officer, No. 3 Squadron, on an airfield in Kairouan, Tunisia, North Africa, 1943.⁸³

According to Tom Russell, the Australian airmen carried a note to let rescuing Arabs know they were Australian rather than Germans because the Arabs didn't look favourably on the Axis forces – and in fact gave them the 'Berber' treatment. The note was called a 'Goolie Chit' because when an Australian airman handed it to the desert Arabs it was hoped the chit would save the pilot from castration (Russell & Oglethorpe, pers. comm. 2013). As well as promising to repay Arab people who saved Allied airmen in the desert, the Chit, issued by the British Government, contains

fascinating information about Arab culture and how airmen should conduct themselves while they were being treated to Arab hospitality.

'Goolie Chit'

الحكومة البريطانية



BRITISH GOVERNMENT

الى كل عربي كريم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد ، فحامل هذا الكتاب ضابط بالجيش البريطاني وهو صديق وفي لكافة الشعوب العربية فارجو أن تعاملوه بالعرف والاحكام . وأن تحافظوا على حياته من كل طارئ ، ونأمل عند الاضطرار أن تقدموا له ما يحتاج اليه من طعام وشراب . وأن ترشدوه الى أقرب معسكر بريطاني . وسنكافئكم مالياً بسخاء على ما تسدونه اليه من خدمات .
والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته
القيادة البريطانية العامة في الشرق الاوسط

To All Arab Peoples — Greetings and Peace be upon you. The bearer of this letter is an Officer of the British Government; and a friend of all Arabs. Treat him well, guard him from harm, give him food and drink, help him to return to the nearest British soldiers and you will be rewarded. Peace and the Mercy of God upon you. *The British High Command in the East*

SOME POINTS ON CONDUCT WHEN MEETING THE ARABS IN THE DESERT.

Remove footwear on entering their tents. Completely ignore their women. If thirsty drink the water they offer, but DO NOT fill your waterbottle from their personal supply. Go to their well and fetch what you want. Never neglect any puddle or other water supply for topping up your bottle. Use the Halazone included in your Aid Box. Do not expect breakfast if you sleep the night. Arabs will give you a mid-day or evening meal.

REMEMBER, NEVER TRY AND HURRY IN THE DESERT, SLOW AND SURE DOES IT.

A few useful words

English	Arabic	English	Arabic
English	Ingleezi	Day	Nahaar or Yom
Friend	Sa-hib, Sa-deck.	Night	Layl
Water	Moya	Half	Nuss
Food	Akl	Half a day	Nuss il Nahaar
Village	Balaad	Near	Gareeb
Tired	Ta-eban	Far	Baeed
Take me to the English and you will be rewarded.		Hud nee eind el Ingleez wa tahud	
English Flying Officer		Mu-ka-fa.	
How far (how many kilos?)		Za-bit Ingleezi Tye-yara	
Enemy		Kam kilo ?	
		Germani, Taliani, Siziliani	

Distance and time: Remember, Slow & Sure does it

The older Arabs cannot read, write or tell the time. They measure distance by the number of days journey. "Near" may mean 10 minutes or 10 hours. Far probably means over a days journey. A days journey is probably about 30 miles. The younger Arabs are more accurate.

GOOD LUCK

The Safety Pass issued to WWII pilots flying in the Middle East.⁹⁴

B**BRIAN EATON** also described an Australian wartime practice to rival castration for cruelty. He'd been put in charge of a rowdy contingent of 70 Australian airmen, eight pilots, two doctors, and a prisoner on a troopship heading for the Middle East in October, 1942.

The prisoner was a pilot who'd been traumatised by flying and had fled back to Australia where he'd been found, taken prisoner and was being returned to the Middle East to be court martialled by the RAF.

'He was a good young lad, and he just couldn't take the aircraft ... so he was branded a coward ... He deserted. And he came back to Australia ... and the Australians sent him back to be court-martialled by the RAF – shades of Trooper Morant I think – and I had to take him back ... He should never have been put onto an aircraft.'⁸⁴

Tom Russell echoes Brian Eaton's concern about the RAAF's treatment of traumatised pilots. He describes many of these pilots being sent home from the Middle East under a cloud. 'They discharged them with the label LMF or "Lacking Moral Fibre" when they should have been more properly categorised as psychologically unsuitable.' (Pers. comm. 2013.)

James Oglethorpe provides more information about the harsh treatment of flyers:

Over on the 460 SQN website they say with authority: If any airman, due to a breakdown in nerves, sickness, fright, or any other reason, was unable to, or refused to fly, he was branded LMF (lack of moral fibre). Aircrew were not very happy about this label. Someone could fly twenty trips and due to nerves, stretched beyond the limit of endurance, then be branded LMF. Unlike the brand of cowardice, which carried the death penalty in the First World War, LMF meant stripping of wings (a qualification badge), stripping of rank, and a dishonourable discharge. (Pers. comm. 2013.)

Interestingly, he adds that the death penalty for British deserters was not applied to Aussies and the result was nothing more than a very slightly increased desertion rate – proving the illogic of the British death penalty for desertion.

One can't help appreciating the pressure test pilots like Jack felt to 'go up again' even when they'd been testing Spitfires for two or more years at triple the RAAF's own recommended test flight flying hours.

A SUPERB chapter on escapes and evasions by RAAF airmen in Europe and North Africa is to be found in *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Volume 4, 'Air Power Over Europe, 1944-45', written by John Herington. Flight Sergeant Warwick's notable escape and trek through the desert is described in it. An engrossing read of Herington's dramatic escape stories, backed up by sound research, can be found Volume 4, Chapter 19, 'Evaders and Prisoners'. The Australian War Memorial has the whole series of *Australia in the War of 1939-1945* online.

21 Jan. 1943 - Kasfareet

I look like catching a boat. Also coming from 458 Squadron are Sven Hansen and Jack Bond.

And with us are Roy Dyson the D.F.M. [Distinguished Flying Medal] from 450, Keith Kilday D.F.M. from No. 3, Reg Fifer from No. 3 [Reg Pfeiffer was by this time known as Fifer], John Waddy D.F.C. [Distinguished Flying Cross] from the Spits, Ron Cundy D.F.C. D.F.M., Duffy from the Australian Air Ambulance Units, Jack Emery who was set on fire by a Messerschmitt taking a Maryland off, Jack Freer who had an eye shot out by a cannon shell on No 3, a dozen or so more whom I don't know and three or four New Zealanders.

Shearman, Ted Strom, Bob Wardrobe and co are here at Kasfareet. They've been ferrying new kites up to the forward landing grounds and bringing the clapped out ones back. They were telling me they'd all got pranged on the run home except John Wells, when in came Wells with plaster on his head – he'd just got back after putting an old Hurricane down on its belly in the Blue [the desert]. So now they've all had that experience.

JACK DESCRIBES the injured John Wells arriving at Kasfareet after his prang in the desert. John provides a snapshot of the seemingly ordinary life rendered extraordinary by war. A sales representative for the Parker Shoe Company in Sydney, John he enlisted in 1941. Then, at 21 years of age, he was flying aircraft all around the Middle East, rising through the ranks from Leading Aircraftsman to Flight Lieutenant by 1944.⁷³

This was probably not what John had expected to be doing when he joined the Parker Shoe Company.

22 Jan. 1943 - Kasfareet

We have our own private mess here – more comfortable and better supplied than the regular station mess.

We sit in a circle of cane chairs and each shout is a dozen of Fosters! Ted Strom wangles it. He's a wizard at producing good beer in the most unlikely places – South West of Ceylon for instance – rationing notwithstanding. Keith Kildey, John Waddy, Reg Fifer, Roy Dyson and Kiwis came over last night – Dyson is forbidden to drink on account of a stomach ulcer brought on by bad food, nervous strain and grog – but maleeshed [disregarded] the gut last night and hopped into it.

It was the Kiwis' first contact with Aussie beer and they're still in a coma this morning.

TED STROM'S courage, enterprise and ingenuity weren't restricted to his 'wizardry' in 'wangling' refreshments. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on 25 August, 1944 and added a bar to it in 1945. He'd sailed for the Middle East on the *Mulberrra* with Jack and the rest of the April '42 contingent and then became another of No. 3 Squadron's nomads until he was assigned to No. 450 (Kittyhawk) Squadron in May 1943. No. 450 squadron was based at Berca Aerodrome, Benghazi where Jack spent time in the waterlogged camp after his Christmas Day at Marble Arch. Ted, on an extended tour of duty, then earned his citation for courageous flying over Italy and generally creating havoc.⁵⁸

23 Jan. 1943 - Kasfareet

I asked permission early this morning to go to Cairo for the day. Horrified refusal – 'Convoy about to pull out.'

Anyway I took a chance and with Bob Wardrobe picked up a Yank wagon driven by some Americans. They were passing a bottle of whisky to and fro and the driving became progressively more hairy.

Wardrobe said, 'Anyway – we needed a fast lift.'

Near the half-way house an Egyptian V-8 water truck tried to pass us. The Yanks were not in favour and stepped on it. The Gyppos ditto and drew level again, both vehicles doing about 90 [mph]. Suddenly the wind lifted the



The Pyramid of Menkaure (Mycerinus) is the smallest of the three pyramids of Giza. (Photo in Jack's collection.)

bonnet of the Egyptians' truck, plastering it back against the windscreen. The V.8., with drivers blinded, careered off the road and ground-looped to a standstill in a cloud of dust. The Yanks laughed uproariously and drank some more whisky.

Pongo, a sergeant major also a passenger, felt he couldn't stand the strain sober so pulled out a flask of scotch and soon we were all in a Cairo-or-bust frame of mind.

One of my boots needed restitching, so Wardrobe offered to take it to a bootmaker while I had a hair-cut. I sat in a barber's chair down near the Diana Cinema, took off the boot and away he went.

He was a long time coming back, and I couldn't leave the barber only half-shod so I endured a haircut, shave, shampoo, massage and mo-trim [moustache], and an Arab kid had shined the badge on my cap till he could see his face in it, and was cleaning an oil spot off my sleeve with petrol when a very welcome Wardrobe finally brought my boot back.

A few jugs with Salvo, steak-and-everything, a bit of shopping and sit out for a taxi for the road to Suez, there to get a lift to Kasfareet. Steam poured from taxi's radiator, and the floor boards felt hot so the Arab second dickie clambered out to the starboard mudguard, lifted the bonnet and peered into the wheezing junk-pile that propelled the vehicle.

The engine finally seized up out by the Egyptian Army barracks. 'Mafeesh maya' [no water] quoth the driver philosophically so we paid him and walked to an M.P. post where we got aboard a large, rakish, screenless car driven by a paratroop major. He told us the car was used to chase Jerry transport that took to the blue, and it looked like it.

He drove like a bat out of Hell, and were we good and scared! You could feel her lift sideways when the air got under her. The road was just a blurred ribbon rushing at us.

To pass a crashed plane being towed along the road he hurtled off into the burdu and leapt ditches, gibbers [rocky desert surfaces] etc. without slackening speed for a couple of miles, then back onto the road. At the halfway house some red-caps came out in front of the place and held up their hands. The draught as we went thru must have nearly blown them over.

A few miles from Kasfareet he pulled up and said he really couldn't drive us right to the camp. He was in a hurry to get to his unit, which was off the road, as he had a high fever!

Some Indians in an A.S.C. [Army Service Corps] truck took us on. I was convinced during the ride with the major that he'd kill us, and I don't think we missed it by much.

Tues. 2 Feb. 1943 - Messina Eritrea

I'm on the 'Queen Mary'. There's a convoy of ships assembling here – 'Ile de France' and 'Aquitania' are already with us. We went aboard at Suez on Jan 24 and are here for a few days. Native boats are alongside with tomatoes and eggs. There are the masts and funnels of about 14 sunken ships visible above the surface of the harbour. It's a low flat town with a few rather nice Italian buildings, backed by razor-backed ranges capped with rain-clouds.

I was lying on the deck with Roy Dyson and a colonel nearly walked on me. It was Ted Onslow, who gave me my first flying lessons before the war. Off we went to his cabin for a few whiskies and some reminiscing. Now he's C.O. 2/2nd M.G. [Machine Gun] Battalion.

Also met Val Balteau, their M.O. [Medical Officer] and Southwell Keely. I still feel a pain over the left eye when I remember a 2/2nd dining-in night to which I was invited back in Australia before they left.

There are over 10,000 Australian troops on this ship, and they want to play two-up. The officers in charge say, 'No.' So we've had a spot of trouble, during which the ship's Adjutant was knocked cold and only escaped being thrown overboard by the vote of a very slight majority. We also have 200 V.A.D.s [Voluntary Aid Detachment – usually field nurses] and about a dozen nurses.

Learning to fly with Ted Macarthur Onslow in 1938.



'Ted Macarthur Onslow, with self a jittery pupil, beating-up by request a film Unit. Macquarie Grove, Camden, 1938.' (Jack's inscription on back of the photograph.)

The Queen Mary carrying troops.



*Painted grey as camouflage the Queen Mary and her sister ship, the Queen Elizabeth, shuttled troops across the Pacific Ocean to and from the Middle East. On her return trips from the Middle East in 1943 the Queen Mary carried up to 15,000 troops per trip. There were four shifts for eating and two for sleeping in the tiers of fixed bunks or 'standees'.⁵⁹
(Photographs: R Goossens, R.M.S. Queen Mary, 'The Grey Ghost at Sea'.⁶⁰)*

Feb. 4 1943

We're in the Gulf of Aden. Quite a crowd of us. The 'Queen Mary', 'Aquitania', 'Nieu Amsterdam', 'Ile de France', 'Queen of Bermuda', a cruiser, and six destroyers. 30,000 troops. The whole 9th Division AIF.

Today a tiny decrepit tanker of about 400 tons appeared wallowing in the middle of the convoy. I could picture the crew stoking like mad to try and stay with us. She quickly fell astern with a 'Hey, wait for me,' look on her face.

Friday 5 Feb. 1943

We have air escort, Blenheims. We're giving lectures to the troops on aerial subjects. The boat deck is like a busy city street – hordes strolling to and fro.

The whole convoy's zig-zagging like mad.

Last night Roy Dyson and I felt hungry so we went foraging. We found a sing-song in progress in a kitchen way down below. We joined in for a while and came up with a dozen grilled chops and some chipped potatoes.

We Flight Sergeants are graciously allowed to use the W.O.'s [Warrant Officer's] lounge. Best beer service on the ship. Not a great number of customers and plenty of light amber.

The officers on the other hand are lucky, in theirs, if by bribery and threats they get two or three in on an evening. There are 800 of them.

W.O. Bob Wrads, a pre-war cobbler of Dyson's, is a great entertainer with pantomime reminiscences.

There are four sittings at each meal. When the mess stewards are ready someone screams, 'Let 'em in!' And the doors are thrown wide and hordes stream in. Thousands of them. Makes you dizzy to watch it.

Thank God the V.A.D. nurses are aboard. Just for the relief to the eye afforded by a glimpse of colour among the sea of khaki on deck.

We bunk in what in happier times were the Turkish baths. They were meant to be hot in the North Atlantic. Down here near the line [the Equator] they're unbearable. Dyson and I sleep in a lifeboat slung back aft on the boat deck. You glance over the side at the Indian Ocean creaming past sixty feet below.

One night we all slept on the deck and a hurricane came up. I had my feet into the wind and woke with all my blankets



*The next shift lining up to eat in the Queen Mary's first class lounge.
(Photograph: R Goossens, R.M.S. Queen Mary,
'The Grey Ghost at Sea, 2010.')*⁶¹

round my neck like a scarf. Jack Bond slept head to the wind and woke clinging to the nearest end of his blankets which streamed out like a horizontal flag.

Craps is the favourite pastime. Bond's luck has to be seen to be believed. I lost a fiver the first day at it, then lost 20 quid trying to get it back. 'Roll them bones!'

War historian Hilary St. George Saunders reported in Life Magazine that sometimes 'three tons of sausages were cooked in a day'.⁶²

Mon Feb. 8 1943

I believe we're heading for the Maldive group S.W. of Ceylon to oil up. A Catalina picked us up today and hung around. Possibly some of the Cats are ones we knew at Kogalla in Ceylon last year.

There was a party in our lounge yestereve. Keith Kildey came in with Royce Bockman M.C. [Military Cross], an AIF wild man who personally bayoneted a hell of a lot of Jerries to win the gong. Bob Wood and his coterie fangathered with us. Wassail and song. Harry the steward rendered yeoman service.

Some great war stories come to light at these affairs. Fresh, still in the mind.

There was the story of Rex Bayly of 3 Squadron cut off by several 109s. He called up the mob for a bit of assistance but everyone was too busy keeping the white spinners off their own tails to reply.

However someone was sufficiently interested ten minutes later to call up Bayly and enquire, 'Have you had it yet?' [Tom Russell remembers it was Keith Kildey who made this laconic broadcast.]

One day there was an extensive tank battle out in the Blue, and inter-plane chatter from the air was interfering with the tank inter-com. From the desert came a beautiful English voice, 'I say, Air Force, could you be a little more quiet - we have a battle down here.'

Clammy silence from the air, then, 'And what the Hell do you think this is – a bloody grandstand seat?'

After leaving the lounge Wood and I tripped up all the officers proceeding along the corridors, up to and including the rank of Captain. Then had an all-fours race down the stair case. Had to lose some skin off my face to win. Down to Blue's cabin for supper – a leg of mutton and fresh bread and butter. Also tea. Blue is an AIF type who has the ship's crew organised.

The ship's Adjutant and other officers tried to stop a boxing tournament aft because it was not being run the way they wanted it. The Adjutant was KO'd. Bloke in the clink.

Our Catalina disappeared N.E. into a clammy heliotrope [mauve] sky. Tropical storms.

Feb. 9 1943

At 3.30 this afternoon the convoy split and dispersed, re-forming in line astern led by A.M.C. [Armed Merchant Cruiser] 'Queen of Bermuda'.

We could barely discern surf breaking a long way ahead. Slowly a low island appeared, the land seeming hardly above the sea. Thick with coconut palms. We sailed along the southern shore and in through a narrow gap.

A perfect atoll. A horseshoe shaped coral reef enclosing a stretch of calm water four or five miles across. The reef at its widest is about 300 yards and broken to form a series of elongated islands. Clustered among the palms are tents and native shacks. Flying boats and oil tankers are floating near the shore. The Catalinas are Dutch and were at Kogalla when we were there [in Sri Lanka]. The islanders came out in boats propelled by square sails and oars. Obviously Singhalese they shouted 'Eibwan' and 'Bahamahundai' like our friends at Galle.

From the boat deck of the 'Queen Mary' we can see over the land to the sea. The highest land on the reef is only a few feet above the sea.

It was a splendid sight – the big ships steaming in through the gap in the line, towering above the palms.

We're parked about half a mile off the southern shore with oil and water tankers alongside. Ubiquitous Tommies are whizzing about in launches. I heard the island is the Addu Atoll [the Maldives] but there's some doubt about this.

10 Feb. 1943

We left the island this afternoon. Passed through the gap in the reef at 2. P.M. ship's time. A mine-sweeper crew chalked 'Good Luck' on the ship's side and waved as we passed.

Out into the swell again. Heat!

We believe the Japs bombed Trincomalee [a port city in Eastern Province, Sri Lanka] last night. Possibly had it planned as we were to re-fuel there.

Announced over ship's loud speakers we may sight the Eastern Fleet this afternoon about 4.30.

Incidentally, the ship's time has been moved on at an amazing rate. We breakfast at 9.30 am and it's still pitch dark afterwards when we get back on deck.

The Southern Cross is in view now.

SHIP'S TIME is adjusted by one hour when the ship enters a new time zone. As the *Queen Mary* was travelling east the ship's clocks would have been moved forward so that eventually breakfast time of 9.30am could have been at 4.30am in the relevant time zone – hence après breakfast deck sports in the dark!

11 Feb. 1943

We met part of the fleet yesterday – 3 battleships including HMS Warspite, and 3 cruisers. Our convoy sailed with them for a while – there seemed to be ships from horizon to horizon. They were gone this morning.

I met John Parkhill to-day. He's in Ted Onslow's unit – A.I.F.

It's hot as Hades below – our clothes are soaked through in a few minutes. We still spend evenings swapping experiences with the A.I.F. over a few beers.

We're running South down the middle of the Indian Ocean. The Southern Cross is climbing higher and higher.

Dyson and I lie in our lifeboat at night and look at the stars. Roy reckons they're brighter and thicker in the Northern Hemisphere.

THE EASTERN Fleet was under the command of Admiral Somerville whose account of the 'friendly' fire on the Catalina follows the entry Jack wrote on 7 August 1942 while he was in Sri Lanka on his way to the Middle East.

Sat. 13 Feb. 1943

An American gunner was buried at sea at sundown. All the ships in the convoy flew their ensigns at half mast as he slid over the stern, wrapped in a flag himself. That's a better funeral than he'd ever get ashore.

14 Feb. 1943

Three sandhappy [too long in the desert] A.I.F. officers are in their cabin with hangovers. One is feeding his Sam Browne [belt] like a ticker-tape into the waste paper basket. The alarm clock rings. One leaps to his feet and rushes to the centre of the cabin aiming vicious lefts, rights and uppercuts.

The ticker-taper lifts the clock to ear and says, 'Who's speaking?'

The Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses have a verse:-

I wish I were a fascinating bitch
I'd never be poor
I'd always be rich
I'd live in a house with a little red light
I'd sleep all day
And I'd work all night.

17 Feb. 1943

There's a sub scare. The gunners stood-to all night. We were forced to sleep in clothes and Mae Wests. Nothing came of it. The Catalinas are with us again, so land is not more than a couple of days off.

18 Feb. 1943

There were land flares this morning. At 12 noon we were off Rottnest Island. We berthed off Fremantle. Roy Dyson could see the pine trees along his home street. He looked like having to come on to Sydney, but at the last moment they took him ashore in a launch. He sat in the back like a long, dishevelled Admiral.

19 Feb. 1943

My birthday today and an old Wirra clattered round the ship. Shades of Wagga!

JACK HAD turned 30.

20 Feb. 1943

I met Harold Leedham – younger brother of Cliff of that ilk who trained with me at Wagga.

All the W.A. troops have gone ashore. At 6.10 p.m. we moved out on the last lap. Saw a Yank ship crowded with troops moving out too. India, they say.

We've got some Aussie newspapers. There was a Jap kite over Sydney.

Sunday 21 Feb. 1943

Mass is held in strange surroundings on the 'Queen M'. The walls of the Warrant Officers' lounge consist of modern murals in which nude females play the leading part. Not in very modest attitudes either. And it says much for the fervour of the congregation that the priest holds their attention, for that's where the Mass is offered.

Tues. 23 Feb. 1943

Very cold and very calm. We're a good way south now. Going down round Tasmania before turning north. Each day is like a week. We reach Sydney on Saturday.

A few Albatrosses are with us.

The beer has run out. Mafeesh beera! Khallas!! [Khallas is used in India to say, You are a goner! Finished!]

Clothing is rationed in Australia. We're to get 25 coupons and the officers 50, including our two dingo [cowardly] specimens travelling home in luxury because they refused to fly operations. [The dingo specimens aren't named!]

We've been 35 days aboard.

Chillier and chillier! Sailing into a biting easterly. You can lean against it. Digging out the battledress and scarves.

Wed 24 Feb. 1943

Fine, calm and cold. Plenty of company. We've been joined by a large cruiser, two more destroyers, 3 Hudson bombers and a school of whales blowing right out to the horizon.

The 'Nieu Amsterdam' has been taken away northward to berth at Melbourne.

10.00 pm. There are planes overhead. A flare was dropped. Gunners were called out and stood-to all night.

Thurs. 25 Feb. 1943

Saw land this afternoon. Dim rugged mountains. The south coast of Tasmania.

What would Tasman think if he could see this convoy? 30,000 men and ships up to 87,000 tons.

The cruiser which joined us a couple of days ago is the 'Australia'.

Saturday morning, 27th February 1943

The cliffs and beaches of Sydney are in view and growing clearer. Everyone is watching in silence. Probably thinking, 'A couple of weeks of it and then more bloody war!'

And it doesn't sink in, yet, that we're home.

A hot, fine day – the Sydney Harbour Heads looking their best. People crowded like ants along the cliff-tops, and the 'Australia' leading the way in.

20 March 1943 - No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School, Port Pirie, South Australia [2BAGS]

I'm at the No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School, Port Pirie, SA. I had a fortnight's disembarkation leave in Sydney, then got posted here. I'm flying Battles! Didn't think there were any left. I arrived yesterday. Saw Jack Bond and Emery in Melbourne coming through. They're still awaiting medical decisions.

There are a few old friends here. Joe McNeill, Bob Moody, Scott-Murphy, who were up at Singapore. And Phil Hamilton-Foster, Gibson, Dave Brennan, who trained with me at Wagga.

Flying here is a stooge job. Kind of aviator's rest home. We fly observers and gunners around while they polish up their bombing and shooting. I'm in the gunnery business.

FAIREY BATTLES were training aircraft brought to Australia between June 1940 and December 1943. They were single engine military ground attack fighter and bombing/gunnery trainers. Their crew was one pilot, one gunner, and one bomb aimer (lying prone in the bottom of the fuselage).

Built by C.R. Fairey for the RAF in 1936 they were powered by a single Rolls Royce Merlin engine. It wasn't an ideal aircraft given the bomb load, the distances it needed to cover, and its limited defensive capability with only one gun. But with the Luftwaffe becoming a threat by 1935 the RAF was in urgent need of attack aircraft so ordered it into production.⁶³

In 1943 the RAAF's air training accidents were still significant. Joe McNeill survived burns and head injuries three months later in June, 1943, when his Kittyhawk caught fire in the air and crash landed at Yelta airstrip near Mildura, South Australia (where the No. 2 Operations Training Unit was located.)⁶⁴

And the record keeping could be accident prone too. Robert (Bob) Moody's war record shows he was with No. 453 Squadron, Malaya, in January, 1942.⁶⁵ But his name, along with Joe McNeill and Scott-Murphy's, doesn't appear on the Nominal Roll lists with those who served in Malaya – presumably due to a glitch in the record keeping.

3 April 1943

Shaky-do for one Bunny Anderson to-day. There was a bad glycol leak so he force-landed on the bombing range. As he touched down the kite caught alight. They got out O.K. as well as the observers – he saved his chute and bomb sight. Bob Moody was Range Safety Officer and was peering into the smouldering remnants when he saw two unexploded bombs.

‘Iushi igri!’ [Run!]

Moody is R.S.O. [Range Safety Officer] for a month as punishment for low flying. Bill James ditto for an aerobatic take-off. Looks like you can’t aviate desert fashion here. Back in the Red Tape belt.

I was to take a kite up and test it. F/Lt Lance Newbound, our flight O.C. [Officer Commanding] asked me if I’d take a WAAAF [Women’s Auxilliary Australian Airforce] up. There are a few here and they get occasional flights to keep them interested in their work.

She was a tiny one, and after we’d stuffed her into a flying suit, ditto boots and chute, she was about as mobile as a deep-sea diver.

A couple of mechanics hoisted her into the gunner’s cockpit – a bit too energetically. She went in head-first – just the boots sticking up out of the cockpit. They got her right side up and strapped in and we went up and played in the clouds.

They’ve got some Ryan monoplanes here – so tiny you’d never think they’d carry a man. I took one up and at 2000 feet the motor cut and I barely scraped home. They’re here for our recreation.

Phil Hamilton-Foster was towing the drogue while my gunners fired at it. The clouds forced us down nearly onto the water, so we climbed through them and out on top.

Flying in or above clouds is a pleasure that never wears off. As you break the surface into the sunlight above, the clouds are the whitest white, and sky the bluest blue you ever saw. And your plane’s shadow has a rainbow round it, on the cloud floor below you.

We tore along, plunging in and out of the whiteness like porpoises.

Dave Brennan is going, and yestereve in the mess we waved farewell with bottles of champagne. Newbound and the Wing-Commander came in during the wassail and participated. Newbound discovered after about his 15th drink that he could play the piano.

Hamilton-Foster taxied past me with a hell of a gash in the leading edge of his wing. I gestured that I was praying for him, and Phil pantomimed a 'stripping' parade. [Where the badges of a disgraced serviceman are ripped off.]

He was beating up a road and flew through a tree. He climbed up, finished his detail, then landed back on the drome.

The damage was too serious for the riggers to 'cover' him, so it looks like a court martial.

A couple of weeks ago Phil was doing-over a train at dot [zero] feet and some horses got so excited one of them collected a tree and killed himself. Severe reprimand for Phil. So this time he expects little mercy.

PHIL HAMILTON-FOSTER obviously wasn't deterred by his reprimand or possible court martial. He enlisted again with the RAAF for the Korean War where he served with No. 77 Squadron. Billy McMahon, then Minister for Air, presented Phil with the Distinguished Flying Cross which he'd been awarded in 1951 for 'Exceptional coolness & skill'.⁹³

30 April 1943 - Port Pirie

Eleven Boomerang fighters landed here en-route to N.W. Australia. Ted Lucky was flying one. The person in charge is an Australian born Chinese and a cracker type.

Boomerangs are nice little kites, but from what we hear of their performance I don't see much future in flying them against Zeros.

2 May 1943

I had a weekend in Adelaide with Jim Waters, our acting O.C.

I found the cartoonist Jack Quayle on Friday. He had a car and a yen for diversion and was still with us when we woke at the crack of noon on Saturday. By which time a lot of water had flowed under the bridge.

3 May 1943

Bill James put the Ryan in a spin to-day. When he tried to come out his shoe slipped past the rudder-bar and stuck. He got his shoe off and pulled out at 1000 feet and the motor cut, so he put her down in a paddock right ahead. Shaky-doo.

They flew Phil Foster round in a Gypsy Moth. He was supposed to identify the paddock where he hit the tree – forced landing – his story. Eventually found one that seemed to fit but C.O. skeptical.

Half a dozen postings to fighters and dive-bombers.

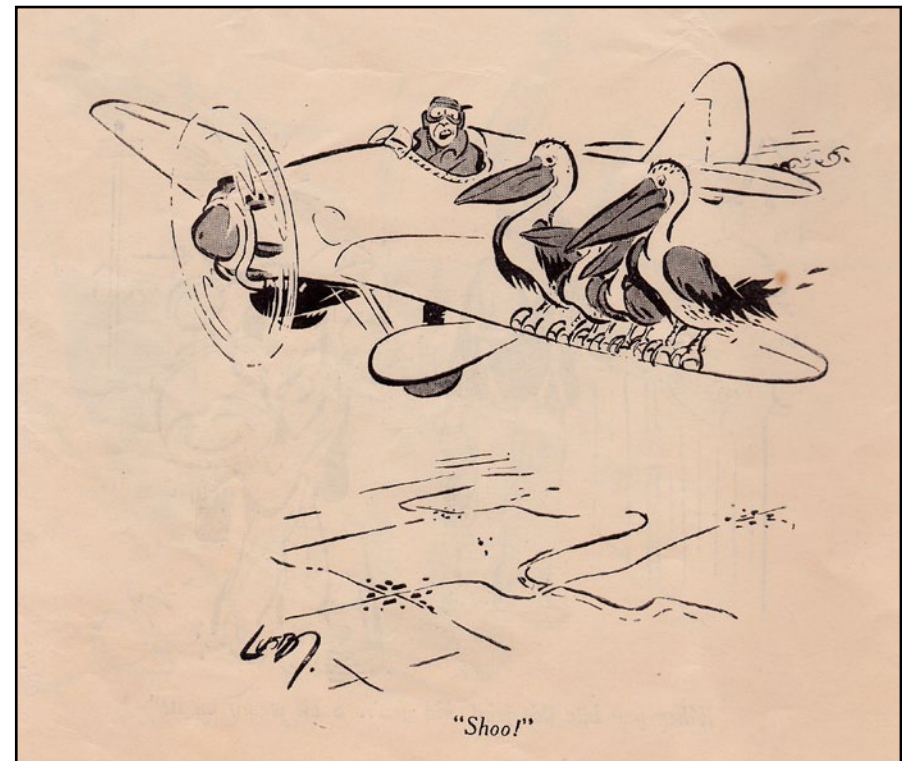
4 May 1943

This morning Stephens and I took up a couple of Ryans and had a kidstake dogfight. These little Ryans do things no aircraft should be able to do.

Rolling off the top of a loop, I left the stick forward too long and did an 'outside' stop turn.

This afternoon Stephens came in with his face a bloody mess. He'd gone out with John Wertheim as his gunner to shoot sea-birds. They hit 5 shags as they were flying through a flock of them. One smashed Stepho's windscreen and a shower of bird and glass smacked him in the face. He was half dazed and lucky he didn't hit the sea. The plane looks like it flew through a fowl-yard.

I was flying near Alf Whittle late this afternoon when I saw his engine cowl flapping loose. I had to almost climb



Cartoon: Thumbs Up! (1941).⁶⁶

out of my plane pantomiming like mad to show him what was wrong.

8 May 1943 – 2BAGS Port Pirie

There was a diversion by Chas Sadler yesterday. He took off at 7 a.m. and was still away at 9.30 – an hour and a half over – so I flew the Ryan out to look for him. Bill James came with me. We found Charlie's kite down in mangroves right on the edge of the Gulf. Camouflage made it hard to see but we happened to fly past very low and saw two gunners waving on the fuselage. We circled a few times – then assumed Chas and one gunner had started walking.

I flew back to the drome and told 'em. Later Charles rang from a range hut which he'd reached after a 3 hour walk through mud, water and mangroves. He'd kept his direction by watching tow-kites dropping drogues at the hut.

The WAAAFs made a little chute which we attached to a bag of rations. Bill James wedged himself and the bag in the front seat and we went over and dropped it by the crash with a note telling the gunners to go to the mouth of a nearby creek and wait for the launch at 4 pm. We flew over again to direct the launch. An hour of zero-feet flying and bloody sign-language. We showed the gunners where to wait. They had four chutes, a gun, and magazines in a heap out on the edge of a mud bank.

We then herded the launch in as near as possible. They set out for the shore in a dinghy but pulled up in the shallows waiting for the two blokes ashore to wade out to them. So we beat up the dinghy till its crew got out and waded in the remaining couple of hundred yards, pushing the boat.

We witnessed the happy reunion at 5 pm as both parties wallowed through the mud towards each other. Bloody long day for the gunners. It was 8 pm before they reached the drome.

Charlie's engine had died over the sea and he'd headed for the nearest land and prayed. He shouted to the 3 gunners to hang on and BOOM! Into the edge of the mangroves. They'll never get the kite out. Bloody good job – it was a 'gutless wonder'.

A good many of these old kites are clattering junk heaps. It's a wonder they don't catch fire or fall apart in the air. The 'Unserviceable' board is usually a pathetic sight towards the end of the day.

This is yesterday's:-

2063 – Complete overhaul
5653 – Cuts out in air
4970 – Missing badly
5633 – Starter Mag U/S
5488 – Solenoid U/S
5797 – Won't start
2188 – Force landed. E. failure

The last named was Charlie's. The new Battles are beautiful to fly. Merlin engines and no bad habits.

Moody was still tanked early this morning after a late party – he was beating up the range hut when his engine cut. He came hurtling into a paddock blazing away with his Very pistol – Tom Mix stuff. He got out and had breakfast with the range crew.

'They'll never get the kite out!'



Charlie's crashed Fairey Battle N2188 as it was when found lying in mangroves north of Port Davis, South Australia, in 1974. (Photograph courtesy Nigel Daw, South Australian Aviation Museum, 1975.)⁶⁷

C**CHARLIE'S N2188** Fairey Battle crash landed in mangroves on 7 May, 1943. The instinct that led Jack to find the Fairey Battle that day was more accurate than his prediction of never being able to get the plane out of the mud and mangroves where it was stuck fast.

NIGEL DAW of the South Australian Aviation Museum takes up the history of the Fairey Battle's retrieval from the mangrove swamp in the *South Australian Air Journal*.

'The site was so swampy only the engine, front cockpit and tail could be salvaged and the rest abandoned. The remains were rediscovered by local aircraft enthusiasts on 8 June, 1974. Over two years the fuselage and one wing were recovered ... The other wing was recovered later and the Battle came to Port Adelaide in September, 1987.'⁶⁸

It wasn't an easy business. Nigel gives a vivid description of one effort:

'At first the attempt went according to plan. As the pontoon was heavy, equipment was towed out and placed near N2188 on the Friday night tide. On Saturday morning the team of five cast off at the Port Davis Jetty and headed out to where the remains lay. After manhandling equipment from the pontoon to the site, mud was sluiced from the starboard wing. Various boards for use as levers, plus a large jack and plenty of sweat and cursing, resulted in the wing finally rising out of the enveloping mud.'⁶⁹

As if in a merging of timeframes the rescue effort in 1975 seems to be a remarkable re-creation of Jack's description in 1943 of finding the crashed air crew perched on the fuselage waiting for help. In 1975 the team hauling the remains of the plane from the mud was found perched on their nearby pontoon as they too waited for help. This time it was a boat from the Port Pirie Yacht Squadron that 'loomed out of the mist to save the castaways'.⁷⁰

After many rescue efforts restoration began in 1998. If history is about reclamation the 'reclamation' of N2188 could be included in the notion of caring for the dead. N2188 is one of only four surviving Fairey Battles and the only one in Australia.⁷¹ In all, 2,203 Battles were built and 364 of these were supplied to the RAAF.⁷³



The restoration of N1288 in progress. (Photograph: South Australian Aviation Museum, 'The Fairey "Battle" Restoration'.)⁷²

10 May 1943

Knucky forgot to put his wheels down and belly-landed on the drome. Probably a court-martial.

Phil Hamilton-Foster went timber-pruning. The act resulted in a severe reprimand and loss of two weeks' pay. He's posted to dive-bombers.

I got a face-full of glycol to-day. Had to pull my goggles up and got it then in the eyes so I couldn't see much. I headed for home and arrived O.K. The glycol tank was too full and when she got hot it blew out.

I've been promoted to Warrant-Officer.

12 May 1943

Wally Martin was towing the drogue today and my gunners fired a beautifully long burst at it. Turned out they had a 'runaway gun' and couldn't stop it.

Later I was taxi-ing out to take off when a fitter jumped on the wing and shouted, 'Watch this one - I'm a bit suspicious of her!'

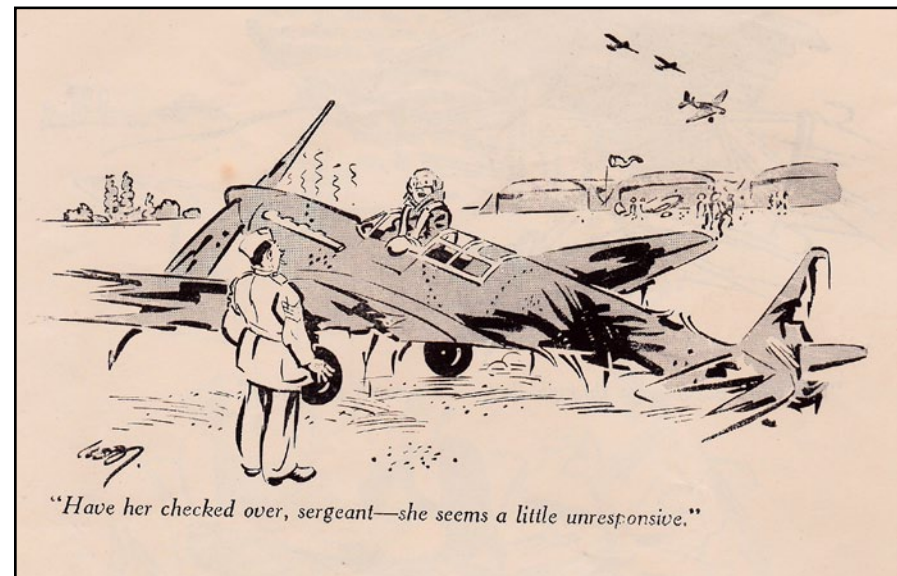
So I ran her up and she dropped 200 revs on the port maggie [engine magneto]. I switched her off and told the gunners to get their gear into the spare kite. Tested the spare and she was worse, so told the gunners to change back to the first one. Were they happy! Eventually we got away. You've got to ignore the revs and temperature and trust the old kite to last the distance.

Denholm had an undercart leg collapse on the landing run and did a beautiful ground loop.

Pathetic sight - a prang on the drome. Anywhere out in the Blue looks quite dignified.

13 May 1943

Best remark of the month comes from Dumbo Barry: 'I was so busy map reading I couldn't see where I was going.'



Cartoon: Thumbs Up! (1941).⁷⁴

He'd force landed about 80 miles off course.

Yestereve Wal Martin, Rappaneker and I whizzed in to a hop [dance] at Pt. Pirie. Took some Burgundy and whisky to keep our spirits up. A brace of WAAAFs disposed of the Burgundy very smartly and it must have softened our rough edges because they're expecting us to take them to a 'do' to-morrow night.

15 May 1943

Phil Foster organised a party last night. Believe I prejudiced its success at one stage by singing songs more fitted to a desert mess than a mixed gathering. However, it passed off O.K. with all hands joining in.

16 May 1943

We had a suite at the pub last night and Phil brought a girl in for a drink. She had a shot-silkish evening gown and a bright red cloak, and when she passed out gracefully on the floor the scene was quite dramatic.

Phil had foolishly fed her a shot of an experimental cocktail concocted by self and Rappaneker. Rapp and I took turns bathing the guinea-pig's alabaster brow with a wet towel while Phil went out and searched for a taxi.

When he found one it was bound for the Blue to bring in a maternity case. The driver refused to believe that the case we had was more serious.

When the lady regained semi-consciousness she moaned, 'Ooooh – how do I look?' and tottered to the mirror to check up.

Then Rapp and I picked her off the floor and put her back on the bed. She still looked pretty good. Phil got a cab at last and took her away.

We had a hell of a job this morning to kick the same driver out of bed to run us back to the drome [No. 2BAGS, Port Pirie].

For breakfast we had a can of peaches and a bottle of Domainie.

It's a lovely day.

Friday 21 May 1943 – Honour Roll

Sandy Jones

Joe Wedderburn

Bill Diehm

Lew Trunley

Watty

Charlie Bromley

Gordon Williams

Len Lauer

Squatter Gell

Joe Saggars

Dave Smith

Ben Shearer

Arthur Ruge

Dick Granville

Wally Parkes

Chesty Warnock

Hunter Smith

Alec Willis

Les Hampstead

More, probably, but I haven't much of memory. Friends who've had it. A little Honour Roll.

I waited for Les Hampstead half an hour yesterday over 2AB rendezvous. He was to tow a drogue for my gunners.

Phil saw his kite roll on its back and dive into a low bank of cloud. It hit right in the town and spattered mud all over the nearest house. He had a drogue operator and an armourer in the back, and they've dug them out, but the engine is 10 feet deep and Les is under it.

Three drogue kites have gone in here for no apparent reason and until someone survives the incident we won't know why.

JOE SAGGERS and Ben Shearer were crew in a Wellington that went down during a shipping strike over the Mediterranean on 5 January 1943. Their bodies were recovered from the sea and buried in Sicily by the Italians.

23 May 1943

We threw a party Friday night for a few of the WAAAFs. It went very smoothly, but if you want to feel really low, attend your friends' funerals with a hangover.

There were three on Saturday morning.

And Gilman's people came to his.

The Air Force turns on a good funeral. Everyone from the C.O. down salutes the dead in turn. Flags on the coffins and the Last Post on the trumpet. And the wake.

We held Hampstead's in the back room of the Barrier Hotel. Piano, food and grog. A room upstairs for the casualties. They were allowed half an hour on the bed, then a cold shower and back to the fray. Wassail and song from midday till midnight.

Vance and I did a quick patrol of the town and ordered all airmen encountered to proceed forthwith to the wake. And once arrived, none left.

25 May 1943

We've been using Battles for fighter formation to keep our hands in. We flew in fours and sixes. Jumping stray kites and diving out of the clouds on towns and railway stations, 'Weavin' like fook, choom'. We pulled out over Pirie to-day at 320 mph and my perspex blew out. That's not very fast, but it's moving for a Battle.

We're organising a weekend up at Broken Hill.

Friday 4 June 1943

We went up to Broken Hill for two days, and Bob McDonald and I stayed a week. Smoky Gray and Ron Vince got out after three days.

With the assistance of Lance Newbound our flight O.C. and Sq/Ldr Strickland, our absence was satisfactorily 'covered'.

The 'Hill' is about 300 miles north. Hospitality is terrific. Impressions are hazy – one long party. I remember constructing a 'bomber' in a hotel lounge using a large cooling fan and sundry furniture.

We started the fan and I climbed aboard, eventually baling out with an umbrella. One evening a big unshaven bloke in a battered lounge suit was introduced to us. He was a local policeman. He had a car outside full of bootleg petrol and drove us, with the girls, to a party. This was exploding in the saloon of a hotel and went all night.

One of the citizens gave us a car. When it cut out later in Argent Street, the Hillites undraped themselves from the verandah posts and gathered round. Some rocked the car, some got underneath it. One cranked it, and another found and fixed a maggie short-circuit. Very little petrol left so somebody fixed that too.

Then, 'She's right, mates!' And off we go.

At one party the host wanted to show movie films, but nobody was sober enough to sit up, so he pointed the projector up and showed films on the ceiling.

That night they put me in a twin bed about midnight. Later they put a female casualty in the other twin bed.

I woke up next day and found the lady asleep adjacent.

Mac and I were finally poured into a bomber that happened along and despatched south. It was quite a touching send-off, and we beat up the town about roof-high, jumping the ridge before leaving.

Back at Pirie, Newbound and Strickland said, 'You drunken bastards!' But were bloody decent in covering us from the Wing Commander and Group Captain.

They've a bundle of highly colourful telegrams we sent from time to time, reporting progress.

I had a letter from a bloke in 4 Squadron New Guinea telling me about George Hocking. George was doing recco over Buna strip in a Wirra and was hit by pom pom ack-ack and crashed on fire in a Kunai patch about 1.5 miles from the gun.

We trained together and were together for some time afterwards. Hinchcliffe has gone in in a Catalina.

SHEILA DRUMMOND, who was to marry Jack, met him during the riotous holiday at Broken Hill. However, without Jack's determination to win the girl for whom he'd fallen, the marriage wouldn't have happened. Sheila had decided not to see him again before she left Broken Hill. But as she stood on the platform at Broken Hill Station waiting for the arrival of the train to take her back to Adelaide, Jack came down the steps shouting, 'Sheila Drummond, Sheila Drummond, where are you Sheila Drummond?'

Sheila hid behind a pillar but when he drew abreast she stepped forward.

'I'm here,' she said, to silence him and put an end to the embarrassment.

Reading Jack's Broken Hill entry one can't help understanding her hesitation after that wild week. However, theirs was an enduring love.



Fairey Battles flying in formation. (Photograph in Jack's collection.)

Monday 7 June 1943

A civvy passenger kite is missing over the Gulf. Smoky, Gray, Vance, Craig and I spent two hours over the drink looking for it yesterday afternoon but no luck. My bus had R.T. [Radio Telephone] so I could talk to the drome and to the RAAF launch.

We took off again at daylight this morning and flew for 2.5 hours at 300-400 feet but only saw a lot of porpoises and sea-birds. Then I called base for instructions and they called us in.

Another search formation took off but still no sign. It must have gone in, broken up and sunk.

We flew by a mine-sweeper also searching. The crew had long yellow jackets.

We've been making 'bombs' out of the contents of Very cartridges and smoke puffs and lighting them by unsuspecting groups of pilots. They go off with a blinding flash and a loud bang and make a hell of a mess. John Wertheim is the chief anarchist. We caught Squadron Leader Strickland this morning.

Mac beat up the drome and had a large strip torn off.

8 June 1943

Shea turned after finishing a landing and his propellor stopped. A new bloke was taxi-ing towards him 100 yards away. He came nearer and nearer till Shea rose in his cockpit and made frantic gestures, but on and on came the other machine till it bored into Shea's kite and wrecked it.

Probably a court-martial for the new bloke.

There was a ball in the mess on Friday. Van Gelder and I were O.C. [Officer Commanding] for the decorations. I whizzed a tender into Pirie to-day and bought all the available material. Ordered a fiver's worth of flowers from Adelaide.

18 June 1943

Had a letter from Alex Mac. He's still in Libya. Wardrobe is coming home! And Sandy Jones is a P.O.W., not dead!

JACK'S NEWS of Wardrobe's return is poignant. Sadly, Bob Wardrobe didn't make it home. He was killed a month later on 20 July, 1943, and was buried in the Tripoli War Cemetery, Libya.

A letter from the RAAF to Bob's father, George, informs him that: 'Your late son was flying in a Kittyhawk aircraft which crashed at Aziza, in the Middle East, as a result of stalling while coming in to land.'⁷⁶ Aziza is a city in northwestern Libya. Bob Wardrobe was 22 years old.

On 21 April 1945, George Wardrobe wrote to the airforce requesting the items that had not been among Bob's personal effects sent to him nine months after his son's death. He was particularly concerned to have Bob's diary. After a flurry of further correspondence regarding the belongings Bob's father believed were still in the Middle East (including the diary), he received the following message from the Central Repository dated 18 April 1946:

PERSONAL EFFECTS OF THE LATE AUSTRALIAN

412221 F SGT. WARDROBE R.B.

I Diary

Finally the diary was winging its way home from the Middle East, three years and four months after Bob's plane crashed at Aziza airstrip.⁷⁷ If only we had the incorrigible Bob Wardrobe's diary. It would surely have been a page-turner!

20 June 1943

Brian Verco and I are to go to Melbourne and fly back two Battles. W/O fitter, Jim Walters, is coming with me.

Friday 2 July 1943 [2BAGS Port Pirie]

Back at last from Melbourne. At first the kites were U/S [unserviceable]. Then weather U/S. So we spent a glorious week in Melbourne. In the Australia Bar I saw Dave Ritchie back from 3 Squadron. Had Xmas with him over there. I heard Danny Boardman is also back.

At Laverton drome I saw John Mowbray. He was in New Guinea with Ges Hockings. The Americans awarded Mowbray and Elton Ifould the Silver Star for low recco in Wirras.



Bob's memorial certificate top right⁷⁸ and Tripoli War Cemetery where he is buried. There are 1,369 servicemen buried in the Cemetery which is in the Mansura district of Tripoli.

During the North African campaign, Tripoli was an important Axis base until taken by Montgomery's forces on 23 January 1943. It then became a hospital centre, and the burials in the war cemetery were almost entirely from hospitals.⁷⁹

(Photographs courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.)

Finally the weather looked like getting worse, if anything, so we took off and hedge-hopped west to Hamilton over beautiful green fields, jumping belts of thick green trees with the rain squalls all round. Walters said we blew a lot of fowls against a wire fence in one farm yard. I hadn't noticed them – I was concentrating on pulling up over the clothes on the line. At Hamilton I circled round the oval where there was a football match then north round the Grampians to Nhill.

The C.O. at Nhill reckoned the weather was too sticky so we spent a couple of days there. Saw the parents of Jack Bond. Wish old Jake the Snake had been there too.

Eventually we got away and flew at nil feet along the Adelaide Railway to the Murray Bridge. At one stage along the Murray River we flew below the willows. Jim Walters kept passing me oranges.

As we passed trains, drivers waved and we saw steam as they blew their whistles in greeting. North from the Murray Bridge to Eudunda then up to 10,000 feet over the clouds to Port Pirie. When we sighted it we stuck our noses down and fairly sizzled home.

THIS EPISODE corresponds very closely to one Jack described later. He and Brian had been ordered to fly to Melbourne by someone in authority at the Port Pirie Base. His mission was to return with a member of the squadron who had gone AWOL to Melbourne. Unable to locate the airman (due to a lack of any effort to do so) Jack and Brian had that 'glorious week in Melbourne'.

They kept sending messages back to the effect that the missing airman had been sighted here and there but could not actually locate him in person – but they were close to finding him they assured. That gave them another day or two before sending the next message about

Pop Ifould receiving his gong in New Guinea!



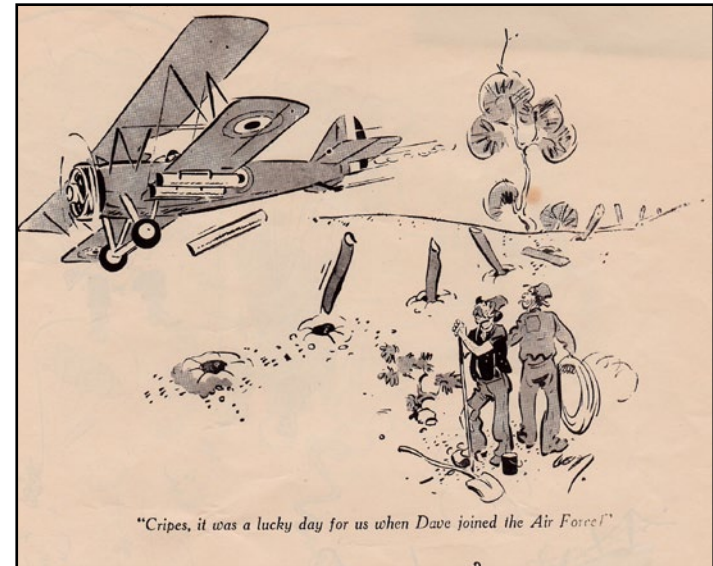
Four recipients of United States of America decorations for distinguished services in the Papuan campaign in 1943. Flt. Lt. Elton (Pop) Ifould, second from the right, is being awarded the United States Silver Star for gallantry. He had been diving in a Wirraway aircraft to tree-top level to locate Japanese gun positions.⁸⁰

being close but again, not finding him yet. Finally, they were ordered to return, despite the weather, and bring the absconder with them. They had of course located him shortly after their arrival in Melbourne so they collected him and set off. As visibility was almost zero Jack flew as low as he could above the Murray River and, using the river as a guide, followed it into South Australia.

As the story goes, on their return to the base Jack, Brian, and the absconder, were standing to attention on the tarmac, when the person-in-authority came out of the administration building and down the steps.

He walked up to the prodigal airman, said something to the effect of, 'Oh, Spiffy, you're back. I thought I'd lost you.' And with that he kissed the airman on the mouth.

Jack and Brian, still standing to attention, hardly dared glance sideways at each other. They'd risked their lives for a lover's tiff – but at least they'd had a 'glorious' week in Melbourne!



Cartoon: Thumbs Up! (1941).⁷⁵

4 July 1943

McLeod to-day gave a beautiful demonstration of the one-wheel landing. The other wouldn't come down, so when the fire-tender and ambulance were ready, in came Mac on the other leg. He held her level right to the last few yards of the landing run. Then the wing dropped and dragged the kite round in a graceful half ground loop. The only damage was a scratched wing-tip.

5 July 1943

Late this afternoon John Wertheim took up two nurses on a test-flight.

As I went out to do a gunnery flight, Lance Newbound asked me to finish early, find Wertheim and put on some sort of a show for the nurses. I found him at 7,000 ft above the cloud layer. We formed close and I could see the ladies in the back – faces fairly glistening with excitement. And the cold air had given them real apple cheeks.

We rolled and dived in the cloud like porpoises for half an hour – beautiful at sunset.

Aug. 27 1943

I'm back at Pirie again. I had a month in Sydney. Then a week in hospital. All O.K.

Two kites collided to-day. Smashed to bits. Two pilots, three gunners and the drogue operator were killed. I flew over and looked. Littered over 3 or 4 acres.

The new C.O. is Group Captain 'Moth' Eaton.

Bob Wardrobe and Mick Shearman were killed in the Middle East. I visited Dr Shearman and Bob's father in Sydney. They take it very well.

Had a letter from Alec – Alex (Sandy) Jones is not dead but a P.O.W.

Mac [refers to Alex Macdonald] did a jump in Sicily. He landed among the peasantry and was in the news.

B**Y THE** time Jack returned from the Middle East his sister, Gwen Lusby, had become a Major and was Chief Medical Officer of Concord Hospital. She said, 'He arrived back looking very thin and very tired.' This may have had some bearing on his week in hospital.

Flight Sergeant David (Mick) Shearman was posted as 'missing presumed dead' on 2 May, 1943. He'd disappeared after flying a Kittyhawk for aeronautics practice from Bu-Grara Landing Ground in Tunisia. Unfortunately his promotion to Warrant Officer, one month after his death, was cancelled and he was returned to the rank of Flight Sergeant.

In a letter to the Department of Air, his father, Doctor Cyril Shearman, wrote that his son's fellow squadron members had written to him, 'convinced that his plane went into the sea and that he was drowned ... and that he would never subsequently be found'.

David (Mick) Shearman was 21 years of age when he died. His personal effects, including 30 beer labels in a tin, two red fez caps, two silver cuff links, and his mail from home, make poignant reading, as do his father's letters requesting further information about his son's disappearance.⁸¹ Like Bob Wardrobe, Mick Shearman had been with Jack from their training days to the Middle East.

Thurs. 2 Sept. 1943

I flew to Adelaide to pick up the C.O.'s gear and batman. Neither turned up so I had a couple of days in Adelaide 'on the house'. A staff car and WAAAF driver were at my disposal. I drove back to the drome and right up to my plane in style. The Parafield pilots were visibly impressed.

While in Adelaide I called with Sheila D. on Jack Quayle. He had a fire in the grate and a bottle of whisky so spent a v. enjoyable hour or so.

SHEILA HAD obviously changed her mind about Jack after she returned from the Broken Hill holiday because Jack Quayle was soon to find himself acting as best man at their wedding held in December 1943.

3 Sept. 1943

A pilot named Scott taxied out to-day with the aileron chock still in place. He was chased frantically by the tarmac crew but he paid no attention. He ignored the red light from the control tower. Took off – climbed to 300 feet – rolled on his back and went in. Plane, pilot and drogue all burned to cinders.

Some saw the pilot's landing when they 'got the wind' from the column of smoke without realising it was a funeral pyre.

Eight killed in a week. C.O. very unhappy about it – he's just taken over.

8 Sept. 1943

Wal Martin taxied to the side of the runway as I was checking for a landing. His brakes failed and he rolled in front of me. He bashed the throttle wide open and just cleared me as I touched down. Much too close.

27 Sept. 1943

Two new lads – inexperienced – have been playing about in the air rather a lot lately and we see little future for them. One, Jacobs, was sent out to-day as drogue operator for the other, Hagger.

He returned with the wing severely battered and plastered with bark and leaves. They'd heard the angels singing. If they harken to the song they may live a little while.

Squadron Leader Cresswell, C.O. 77 Squadron, is here for a court martial. He shot someone in the leg while drunk in the mess. He scored the first 'night victory' against the Japs.

... [A paragraph about an Observer's personal life that may be an embarrassment to any existing family has been omitted by the editor.]

Jack Beer was killed in 3 Squadron. Also Jimmy Paroissein of 458 Squadron.

I was interviewed by a visiting mogul re commission. He asked me if I enjoyed being out at Pirie. I told him the novelty's wearing off.

JACK BEER was by all accounts a very popular airman. His record describes him as 'smart energetic and confident'. Jack Beer had gone from being a clerk and ledger-keeper before the war to flying as a fighter pilot with No. 3 Squadron in the Middle East. He was on a flying 'op' in a Kittyhawk over Sicily when he went missing 'presumed dead' in July 1943.

In a letter to Jack Beer's wife, Brian Eaton, who was No. 3 Squadron's Wing Commander (before his return to Australia in August 1943), wrote: 'Jacky was taking part in a bombing and strafing raid ... near Nicosia in central Sicily ... Jack was not seen after the strafing ... Jacky is missed by all the Squadron.' In a kind gesture, Brian Eaton included his own mother's address and added, 'Should you be in Melbourne I would like you to call on her.'⁸⁵

Following the mogul's visit to Port Pirie, Jack was promoted to Flying Officer.

Jack's glossary of terms finishes his entries for Book 2.

Blueslang

Blue	desert	Moya	water
Gong	decoration	Get cracking	get started
Shufti-kite	recco plane	Get mobile	"
Browned off	fed-up	Crack off	"
Brassed off	"	Gen	Genuine information
Cheesed off	"	Griff	"
Prang	crash	Gear	"
No future	dangerous	G.G.	"
Bundu	'Tiger country'	Gen-man	expert
Erks	ground staff	Tiffin	lunch
Gaggle	fighter formation	Shai	tea
Murgarea	food	Dhobi	laundry
Natter	gossip		

Flying Crews with Wirraway



Flying crews – before Jack left Australia, later to return as a Trainer! Jack is in the front row, fourth from the right. (Photograph in Jack's collection.)

[On to Jack's War BOOK 3](#)

[3 Squadron STORIES](#)

End of Book 2

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