

## John Mills - 100 not out



Dear MAAA,

Enclosed is a picture we took of John with the Mosquito 'Mission Completed' print at his 100th birthday party on Sunday 8th March 2015. He was very taken with your interest and thoughtfulness. I think he is a bit overwhelmed with the whole thing but he really likes the print.

Thank you all for your efforts and kind thoughts around dad's 100th birthday,

Regards Steve Mills

# The President's Log



What I've seen of the Restoration hangar has shown steady progress on documentation of tasks under way and completed on main landing gear components, and the Wednesday Warriors have made impressive progress on fuselage restoration – this is really worth seeing.

David Devenish with help from others have almost completed the storeroom re-work in P-170, and we should be able to move the remainder of MAAA records and equipment to their new home over the next month or so.

I had an enjoyable day at the Avalon Airshow as a volunteer in the RAAF Museum display. It included enlarged panoramic WW1 photos about 2m high x 10m long of Australian Flying Corps air and ground crews as backdrop, a partially restored SE5A biplane and Sopwith Pup replica up front with cardboard cut-outs of aircrew leaning on the aircraft. Story boards with historical notes on the aircraft, a front of house desk and a small theatre off to one side completed the public area.

RAAF Historical and Heritage sections in Canberra had representatives on hand to give short speeches every half hour or so; they were interesting and absorbing – wish I'd had more time to listen.

On my first rostered off period, I stopped at the Lockheed display in one of the three huge marquees and spoke with Mike Kelley of the soft Texan drawl – I had a Mosquito shirt on so we naturally started talking about Lockheed P-38 Lightnings, and the F5F US Marines photo recce version (three of which were flown by the RAAF's 87

Squadron before they re-equipped with Mosies).

The new Lockheed joint strike fighter or F-35A is called Lightning 2. Mike – good bloke – started talking of history bits at Fort Worth, like the remaining launching ramp into Lake Worth once used for test flying PBY Catalina amphibious aircraft immediately before and during WW2 – Fort Worth airfield was once home to their manufacturer who became Convair who became General Dynamics who became etc. etc.

Chatting to people of all ages and answering questions was enjoyable, particularly with the aircraft there as a starter. It helps when everyone (including me) are there because they want to be; makes for good interaction.

Saw a little of the flying displays after lunch, and the only down side of the day: will someone please tell a couple of commentators that their hysterical ravings are not appreciated?

Gravitating to the warbirds and Museum aircraft – as one does – to find David Jones as busy as ever with aircraft parking arrangements – does he ever stop? Back at the tent, the stumps session passed quickly, then into the bus and back to Point Cook after a thoroughly enjoyable day.

## **Reminder:**

A VJ Day 70<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary commemoration service and fly-in will take place on Saturday 15 - Sunday 16 August next year at the former RAAF Base Coomalie Creek, NT.

Friend and MAAA member Richard Luxton will host the event; more details as we approach the date.

## **AGM for 2014-15**

Usually the AGM is held around mid to late August, but due to some Committee members with other commitments, it will be in September. Notifications will be sent to all advising the date a few weeks before.

Terry Burke, President MAAA

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**John Burne Mills**

**Aviation Engineer celebrates 100years**

**“This is John’s Mosquito story”**

**By David Devenish**



Back in 2000, John sent the MAAA an extensive hand written account of his years with de Havilland, which was published in our Bulletins. Below is an abridged extract from these notes which focuses on John’s first-hand story related to building the DH98 Mosquito here in Australia.

The caricature portrait and additional details come from an article published in the “Smiths Weekly” on the 31 January 1948, titled Aviation engineer.

John was born in Melbourne in 1915, the son of a bank manager who was killed in WW1. His mother brought him to Sydney to be educated. He attended Sydney Grammar, then went to University and studied civil engineering.

He became interested in aeronautical engineering as a result of the enthusiasm of one of his lecturers, Tom Leech, had on the subject. To gain practical experience he joined the University Gliding club at a time when sail-planes were unknown here, and the longest the primitive gliders could stay aloft was less than a minute.

de Havilland Australia Company had been set up by Hereward de Havilland (brother of the company’s founder Sir Geoffrey de Havilland) in 1927 as was the oldest overseas de Havilland company and headed by Major Alan Murray Jones from the early 1930s. Major Alan Murray Jones was a World War I pilot of great renown and brought amazing links with everyone connected with civil and military aviation.

I was the first university trained engineer to be employed by Major Murray Jones. I joined de Havilland early 1937 having just graduated in the science and engineering (with honours) and receiving the Geoffrey Sulman memorial prize for Aeronautics for a thesis on the boundary layer. My degree was in civil engineering. The department of aeronautical engineering was not being formed until 1940. I had little practical experience and Major Murray Jones arranged for me to travel to de Havilland England where I worked “on the floor” with our parent company in the aircraft, engine and propeller divisions at Hatfield and Stag Lane.

I also spent a period in the aerodynamics department under Richard Clarkson developing a photographic system for the measurement of aircraft take-off and landing performance which was done as an “extra-curricular” project with Bruce Douglas, ex de Havilland Canada who was running the

laboratory at Hatfield. This work was published as a paper in the journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1939 and in the de Havilland Gazette.

The unique opportunity to work “on the floor” at de Havilland enabled me to get a special view of the de Havilland organisation, including the company’s directors who were around, walking through the factories, greeting the workers. I gained a special insight into how de Havilland had continued between World War I and World War II supplying civil aeroplanes for personal and company use. I obtained a ground engineer’s licence on the propeller and was given the job of inaugurating visits by propeller service persons to each of the flight sheds of the manufacturers using our propellers throughout the country.

I returned to de Havilland Australia as works manager early in 1939 after visiting de Havilland Canada and Hamilton Standard at Hartford, United Airline at Cheyenne and Wyoming in USA.

On the outbreak of war, de Havilland was quickly asked to make two Tiger Moths a day for the empire training scheme, General Motors making the Gypsy Major engines. Major Murray Jones used me as the technical person to get production going, using subcontractors to make metal parts ra-



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ther than making parts in our own plant. There was little industrial backing for an aircraft industry at that time and it must be difficult these days, to realise how relatively unsophisticated industry was generally, at that time.

de Havilland (DH) had the task of making the variable pitch propellers and the constant speed governors that would be needed for Wirraway, Boomerang, Beauforts, Wackett trainers (later) and Beaufighters (later). Ian Spittle was released from de Havilland propeller division, Stag Lane in the UK, to set up our Australian propeller production under Major Murray Jones.

I was transferred to the propeller division in May 1940 as Technical Manager to Ian Spittle, responsible for all technical aspects that included inspection, servicing, engineering and experimental. The experiment included vibration, heat treatment, metallurgical and physical testing. In May 1940, the propeller division had only a few people but grew to over 1000 by the end of 1941. de Havilland propeller division supplied all the needs for CAC and the Aircraft Production Commission on time, and with the constant speed units made locally, made a substantial contribution.



## Australian de Havilland propeller production. (c/o J. Mills)

DH Australia produced over 2000 propellers up to VJ day sufficient for all Australian aeroplanes, which were produced, including the Mosquito. Additionally DH re-paired many propellers not on-

ly for the RAAF but also for the USAF and although I do not have figures, it is my belief that the number of repaired propellers would greatly exceed the new production numbers.

We had a period when we thought that supplies of aluminium could be cut off and we developed wooden propeller blades as an escape solution. These wooden blades were developed with close cooperation with the wood technology section of the CSIRO. The root of the blade was made of strongly reinforced plastic impregnated, compressed wood which was scarf jointed to normal timber and these planks, when glued together, gave a laminated structure of considerable strength.

The shank, of compressed impregnated wood was screwed into a steel sleeve that enabled the normal propeller attachment to the hub, as for the aluminium blade. The wooden bladed propeller was developed, tested, but was not needed. Aluminium was undoubtedly the proper material for war-time propellers.

We at de Havilland were un-aware at that time of the top secret Mosquito in England which was first flight on 25th of November 1940, reached 20 deliveries at the end of 1941 and 1942 from Hatfield. The Mosquito was "top secret" at the end of 1941 when it was used by the US.

After 1941, whilst I was Technical Manager of the propeller division of D. H. Australia, Major Murray Jones called me to his office and showed me the photograph of a beautiful aeroplane and said:

*"A wooden aeroplane, an unarmed bomber, it is the fastest aeroplane in the world, top secret, designed and made by our company, it is called the Mosquito, do you think you can make it here? If so, you and John Spittle should go to Canada immediately, DH Australia is building the Mosquito also and you should go to Canada with Ian Spittle who is travelling to the States."*

(Ian Spittle was Manager of the propeller division of DH Australia and was about to visit the US and UK for machine tool procurement.)

We received from the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr John Curtin, letters of introduction dated Janu-

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ary 2nd 1942. These letters of introduction had large red seals and requested all to help us in our unnamed task. These letters turned out to be quite miraculous wherever we travelled. It was reported that Mr Curtin had said, *“how big should we make the red seals on our letters of introduction?”*

John, Ian and I travelled together to the USA in 1942, Ian for propeller machine tool procurement and John and I for Mosquito matters. The three of us set out for America by the quickest possible means which in this case was the Swedish cargo ship “Kanangoora” which took some three weeks to get us to San Francisco with due security activity as the Japanese were around.

We made immediate contact with DH Canada who could not have more helpful and we visited the Australian Ambassador in Washington who was Sir Richard (later Lord) Casey. We knew that if the building of the Mosquito was to proceed in Australia, supply of engines was essential. The Rolls-Royce Merlin was being made by the Packard Company in the USA and it would be from here that our engines would have to come.

Historically it should be noted that in Australia, at the first meeting of the aircraft advisory committee, held on January the 13th 1942, *“it was noted that the company had dispatched two of its officers at its own expense to investigate the production”* of the Mosquito.

At the seventh meeting on February 23rd, it was recorded that a memorandum to the Department of Air stressed the view that no time should be lost in making arrangements for the construction of these aircraft. That was providing that the air board was satisfied that this is the type of fighter aircraft required for use in this country. This urgency was influenced no doubt by the bombing of Darwin four days previously.

Although DH Canada would do anything they could to help Australian production, it became apparent that if the Mosquito was to be built in Australia, our help would have to come from DH Hatfield. Accordingly I was to proceed to England leaving John Byrne to handle supplies matters in Canada and the USA. My trip to England was by a bomber delivery flight. It was to be a “flying fortress” from Montreal Prestwick, Scotland, via Gander in Newfoundland. Later after some week or two of delay (“weather was a real problem”). I

found myself in the nose bomb-aimers compartment just in front of the navigator who had just completed his empire air training school course and was on his initial flight across the Atlantic. We struck Scotland close to the north tip as morning broke and then turning south we had an amazing flight down the coast of Scotland. For some, one and half hours at an altitude of some 1000 feet, which from the bomb-aimers nose seat on a cloud less sunny morning must have been without parallel. We joined the balloon barrages near Prestwick.

After landing, I spent a very long time traveling to London and then to Hatfield under difficult war-time conditions which were a part of the daily routine in England. Every one took it as a matter of course with air raid warnings and a blacked out existence. Hatfield, the DH headquarters, were quite amazing, producing the Mosquito under the most difficult of conditions and with the aeroplanes versatility and performance now known (the Mosquito was found to be 23 mile per hour faster than the Spitfire). A large number of variants had been made and were being requested.

Hatfield had also been bombed.



**Official de Havilland photo D.H.  
562.F. – Mark IV Bomber on the  
ground and Mk II Fighter in the air.  
(c/o J. Mills)**

With all this pressure on the DH Hatfield the people whom I had got to know when I worked there pre-war could not have been more cooperative

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and friendly. You could have been excused for thinking that all they had to do was to help us make the Mosquito in Australia. We needed drawings of the fighter bomber version for Australia. The drawing office immediately set about making a full set of microfilm photographs of the many hundreds of drawings which constituted the Mark VI version so that I could take them back with me when I returned. They also included masses of technical data and schedules that are so essential.

An addition, suppliers of essential parts had to be released from the ministry of aircraft production. Martin Sharp, a public relations manager in peacetime, was “one of us” and was everyone’s helper in wartime (to sort out essential parts suppliers). (Post war Martin was co-author of the award-winning book, with Michael Bowyer, “Mosquito”, published in 1967 which must be regarded as the Mosquito “official history”).

Arrangements were also made to send to Australia a finished sample Mosquito. RAAF Squadron leader Bruce Rose, came to Hatfield and completed a quick conversion course just before returning to Australia. Bruce Rose, incidentally, was a remarkable pilot of great skill who had one “tin leg”.

In due course when all micro-film drawings and technical data were complete I was able to depart for Australia with a heavy briefcase plus protective strap containing all this precious material about the top secret Mosquito. Naturally I had to take special precautions on the return trip especially with overnight stops. Mr Curtin’s letter worked wonders whenever the contents of the briefcase come under question. The return to Australia was by Pan American clipper from Southampton to Baltimore USA, and by Liberator courier plane from San Francisco to Australia. The clipper was cut to bare essentials and the leather briefcase with its precious drawings constituted the maximum weight of luggage I was allowed.

The Liberator service across the Pacific had been set up to deliver mail, communications and urgent freight to various Pacific islands that had been occupied by US forces. The Liberator had a civil crew. The navigator, with radio silence and no navigation aids did a magnificent job of making each of the various Pacific islands come up in the middle of the horizon at each of our calls. I was the only passenger and we had a machine gun

mounted above the fuselage for some type of defence and the engineer, a civilian, used to try it out on occasions just to satisfy himself. We called at Honolulu, Johnson Island, Christmas Island, Phoenix Island, and Fiji before landing at Williamstown, then a long trip to Sydney followed. It was early January when we left Sydney, early February in the USA and Canada, Hatfield and the UK in April and returned to Australia mid May to early June 1942. On return to Australia I found the excitement intense for the Mosquito project.

DH had been allocated the two top floors of the Bradford Cotton Mills building corner of Missenden Road and Parramatta Road to start the project and priority seemed to have been given for the taking over of factory space and the supply of machine tools which were in short supply. We allocated the top fifth floor of Bradford as administration centre with the fourth floor for metal tooling and machine shop.

I was appointed to be manager DH 98 division with the open brief to get production going as quickly as possible and then hand over to production professionals whom we would gather around us. I was immediately required, on return, to visit Mr Essington Lewis, in supreme command of aircraft production in Australia, to brief him on the remarkable and brilliant aircraft we had to manufacture.

Our first task was to quickly print and catalogue the tens of thousands of microfiche drawings from Hatfield and make a “the bill of material” or “what does it take to build a Mosquito!” And the specially chosen group did this quickly, surveying each drawing and recording the specification and quantity of material requirements. Bradford building has our tool room and machine shop. Harry Shaw, from our propeller division, was devising the ways and means of getting our tooling made at this stage of the war. We were allocated the few toolmakers that were available from Manpower and we set up a training program for men with little metal work experience. They could be trained to take a tool to a certain distance from completion, leaving the skilled toolmakers to complete the job to the required tolerances.

Enthusiasm in the project caused all to work seven days a week until we found that it was taking seven days to do six days work and we then nominally reverted to a six-day week. But the



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pressure was great and this pressure came from each person.



**Australian Mosquito production - the first fuselage being constructed – 4<sup>th</sup> floor Bradford Cotton Mills building, 1942. Fuselage manufacture was transferred to Annandale factory subsequently. (c/o J. Mills)**

Our shops made the first Mosquito wings. We took over a factory at Forest Lodge, where we made the spars, ribs and skins to try our tooling and methods, and assembly of the wings. We did not have the resources for wing production that required considerable area. General Motors at Pagewood had the area and undertook wing production.

Final assembly of the Mosquito would require a special building. This was to be made at Bankstown. Major Murray Jones summoned me to accompany him to Bankstown one day with the purpose of pegging out what would be our assembly hall and flight shed. Bankstown aerodrome was surrounded by virgin land at that time and was in fact, quite a trip from Mascot and Camperdown.

The sample Mosquito DD644 arrived from England and following assembly at Bankstown, flew in Australia on December 17th 1942, the pilot being S/L Bruce Rose. This was a special day for

me because after the first flight which was most impressive Bruce took off again with myself as passenger thus enabling me to experience per-  
spectacular power dive of reaching  
per hour indicated air speed near the  
s was followed by the pull-up and  
al climb for some thousands of feet, for  
Mosquito was becoming famous. It  
remembered that 450 mile per hour indi-  
speed was quite remarkable in pre-jet

fitment with Packard Merlin engines it  
flown on the 23rd March 1943 and lat-  
A52-1001.



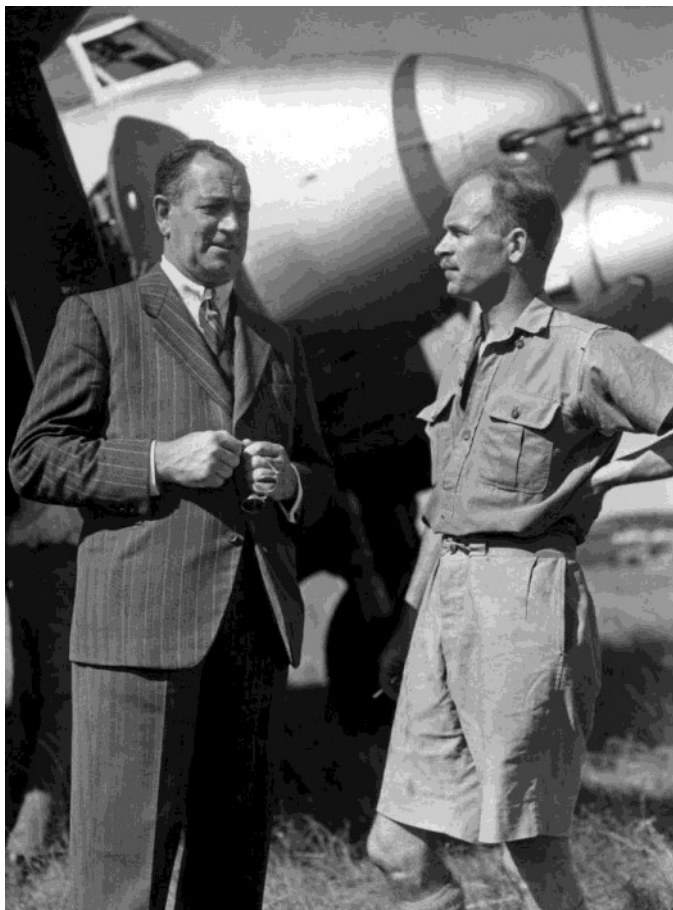
**S/L Bruce Rose alighting from Mosquito DD664 after its first flight in Australia. Bruce Rose (who had a “tin leg” as well as a DFC) had “qualified” at Hatfield before returning to Australia. John Mills (left of Bruce) and Mervyn Waghorn are assisting. (c/o J. Mills)**

The first Australian made Mosquito flew as a fighter bomber, Mark 40 as A52-1 on the 23rd July 1943, Wing Commander H. G. Lee being the test pilot, thus making the period from commencement just over a year. The first delivery to the RAAF was March 4th 1944, followed by the second that month, and one in April, two in May, one in June.

Major Murray Jones appointed me in September 1943 to be the first Chief Engineer of the Australian company with responsibility for engineering,

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inspection, experimental and field service sections of our aircraft division. I was moved to the corporate headquarters that were in the Watson House, Bligh Street in Sydney.



**Allan Murray Jones, general manager of de Havilland Australia Pty Ltd and Wing Commander H. G. Lee (pilot) in front of the first Australian made Mk40 Mosquito, A52-1, on the 23rd July 1943. (c/o J. Mills)**

We had sad times. On the 10th of June 1944 Mervyn Waghorn and I and many others witnessed the breakup of Mosquito A52-12 as it pulled out of a high-speed dive near the ground killing the test pilot, Hubert Boss Walker (who had come to us from CAC) and Peter Rockingham.

Peter, our supply manager, was having his first Mosquito flight. Peter had been brought to Bankstown by myself and given my "seat" in the aeroplane which I had arranged with Boss Walker. When the faulty wing assembly problem was discovered, Major Murray Jones instructed me to personally move into the Page-wood plant of GMH until the matter could be resolved. I remained at Pagewood until the situation was satis-

factory and it was then resolved I should travel to DH England to personally confer about our Australian experiences. The trip to England and return was now much quicker by air. The Qantas Colombo/Perth Liberator flights had now replaced the famous "double sunrise" flights by a Catalina flying boat. Colombo/Karachi was by RAF land plane and Karachi/London and return was by Sunderland flying boat.

I had long talks with Mr Bishop, chief designer of the Mosquito, telling of our Australian Mosquito experiences, our accidents, our difficulties we had experienced and our beliefs about the causes. I went with the best wing making people to learn their latest and was able to return quickly with valuable information.

In May 1944 the RAAF asked DH to convert six FB Mark 40 aircraft to PRU version with five cameras and extra fuel. A special design group was set up in the working party, supplemented by Manpower from the RAAF, did the job quickly, the six PRU aircraft being delivered in October 1944. The trials report showed a range of around 3000 miles with 100 gallon wing drop tanks and internal fuel capacity increased. These are unarmed PRU aircraft saw much service reconnoitring the Japanese north of Australia.

Concluding remarks:

de Havilland Australia completed 103 Mosquitos by V-J day on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 after which production output was reduced. On 22 July 1948 the last Mosquito, A52-327, was completed, and in front of the entire works staff, de Havilland Australia's Managing Director Allan Murray Jones, handed over the aircraft to the Ministry of Air and the RAAF.

John Mills continued as Chief engineer with de Havilland Australia through to 1948, when he joined British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines. BCPA was formed to operate a trans-pacific airline to North America controlled jointly by Britain, New Zealand and Australia.

In 1957, John joined Qantas as Chief Engineer. John's 25 year service with Qantas, included 2 years with Boeing overseeing the 707 jet airliner production.

Compiled by *David Devenish*



# The OAMers



## OAM RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to long term Museum volunteers Geoff Matthews and Ron Gretton , who were recently awarded an Order of Australia Medal. Their award is in recognition of their dedication and rigorous efforts in restoring and preserving RAAF aircraft, and in particular for their toil in constructing the replica Bristol Boxkite to airworthy condition.

**Mr Geoffrey Kenneth MATTHEWS,**  
Werribee Vic 3030

For service to Australian military aviation heritage.

Chief Design Engineer, Project 2014 - Bristol Military Boxkite, Royal Australian Air Force Museum, and Assistant Project Manager, since 2004.

Life Member, Friends of the RAAF Museum, Point Cook, 2003, Volunteer since 1996.  
Received Museum Industry Award for Volunteer of the Year, 2001.

**Mr Ronald Irwin GRETTON AM (Mil),**  
40 Tyrone Street, Werribee Vic 3030

For service to the military through the preservation of military aviation heritage.

Project Manager, Project 2014 - Bristol Military Boxkite, Royal Australian Air Force Museum, since 2004. (Project 2014 commemorates the 100th anniversary of the first military flight in Australia in 1914 by a Bristol Boxkite through the construction of a replica of the plane).

Volunteer, Royal Australian Air Force Museum, 2002-2014.

Member, Royal Australian Air Force Reserves, 1997-2002.

# Mosquito of the month—A52-2

David Devenish has been beaver away for the past decade or so gathering anecdotes, photos, movies and personal items building up a nice array of articles which now has permitted him to produce illustrated stories. This is his first “Mosquito of the month”.

A new photo has come to light of A52-2 (below) at the end of its working life in Richmond, NSW, 1945. A52-2 completed 38 photographic reconnaissance sorties and was known as “Old Faithful”. This name along with its operations log can be seen on the aircraft nose.

On the 2 February 1945, S/L Gamble and FO Lobb departed Coomalie Creek for 2 AD Richmond, NSW, via Canberra (ACT) after the decision was made in January that A52-2 be withdrawn from operation and sent to 2 AD for breaking-up.



**RAAF DH98 Mosquito, A52-2, Richmond NSW 1945.**

David Vincent's book, *Mosquito Monograph*, provides an excellent background to the historical significance of A52-2, which began its short service life as the second FB Mk 40 Mosquito produced by De Havilland, in Australia early 1944.

By this time, de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd had been approached about converting Mosquito FB Mk 40s for photographic reconnaissance work and were agreeable. On the 27<sup>th</sup> March de Havilland proposed to the RAAF that the second production machine (A52-2) be the first aircraft to be modified. This was agreed upon and work commenced on 5<sup>th</sup> April, the first flight to test the cameras taking place on 12 May.

The FB Mk 40 model was equipped with four 20mm cannons and four 0.303" machine guns. However, the first example modified for PR use, A52-2, featured no armament.

In place of the guns were mounted two F24 split vertical cameras whilst a third camera, a F52 was mounted at the rear of the aircraft behind the bomb bay. Certain changes were made internally too. The most important of these was the addition of two fuel tanks of 126 gallon capacity in the bomb bay, the doors of which were fixed in position. This brought the aircraft's total fuel capacity (including wing drop tanks) to 865 gallons. Oil capacity was also increased by the addition of long range tank whilst

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two more oxygen bottles were added and the existing two relocated.

On 26 May 1944, the first crew to be converted to the Mosquito, Flying Officer (FO) Ken Boss-Walker and Pilot Officer (PO) Jeff Love, ferried A52-2 from Bankstown, by way of Laverton (VIC), Port Pirie (SA) and Alice Springs (NT), to Coomalie Creek which was reached on 29 May 1944. Three days later, on 1 June, the aircraft and same crew flew the first operational RAAF Mosquito flight over enemy territory to Ambon, a flight lasting 7 hours 10 minutes.



This sequence of three photos shows A52-2 after returning from one of her first missions and the removal of all important camera magazines.

This aircraft was fitted with one F52-20 inch camera in the fuselage and two F24-8 inch cameras in the nose. The split vertical installation of the latter shows well in the nose view of the aircraft. This arrangement was a trial layout only and subsequent PR Mk 40s were modified to feature one camera (usually a K17-6 inch) in a vertical position in the nose, whilst in the fuselage two cameras (types varied) were mounted in oblique installations.

A52-2 subsequently completed 38 sorties and in so doing became known as “Old Faithful”, a name which was eventually applied to the aircraft’s nose adjacent to its log of operations by her fitter IIA Ern Wenske.

Other original groundstaff assigned to A52-2 were:

W. Johnston (carpenter-rigger),  
R. Baldock (fitter IIE),  
H. Hopgood (fitter IIE),  
J. Stiegrad (flight rigger) and  
W. Povey (aircraft electrician).

(all three courtesy Jeff Love)

During the first month of operations A52-2 flew nine operations, other targets being the Flores and Soemba Islands, Tiworo Strait, Kendari, Ceram, Namlea and, on 25 June, Sourabaya. On the last



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mentioned occasion the aircraft's port engine failed over the target, forcing FO Boss-Walker to fly the 900 miles to Australia on the starboard engine. They reached Broome, Western Australia, after a flying time of 10 hours 25 minutes.

On 14 June 1944 Squadron Leader Green and Navigator Flight Sergeant James became the second crew to fly A52-2 operationally, the target, as on the very first operation, being Ambon. July saw the first of the long range operations carried out by RAAF Mosquitos. A52-2 was sent to Biak island in 15 July to photograph the Davao Gulf area of the Philippine Islands. Bob Green remembers the flight to Biak well:

*"We needed some ground staff who knew something about Merlins and took a Fitter IIE, Corporal H. Hopgood, who lay on a blanket in the aft fuselage forward of the 20 inch belly camera. However, an intercom lead which we rigged failed in flight and a walkabout oxygen bottle became exhausted and the Corporal passed out with the cold and lack of oxygen. He had courage because he returned to Darwin the same way!"*

As to the results of the operation, Bob Green continued,

*"it was typhoon season, the weather was frightful and we got no pictures?"*

A52-2 returned to Coomalie on 18 July.

Eleven days later S/L Hermes and navigator FO J.D. "pop" Bowden flew A52-2 from Truscott strip to Balikpapan (a seaport city on the east coast of the island of Borneo) and return, a distance of 2,235 miles, the longest flight yet made by the unit. An hour and a quarter after the aircraft's return, it was airborne again on a flight to Ambon crewed by S/L Green and PO Love.

In August, A52-2 flew to Noemfoor Island (one of the Biak Islands, formerly Schouten Islands, in Papua province, Indonesia) flown by S/L Green and PO Love. Bob Green takes up the story from there;

*"On 11 August we got pictures of the target. The recce showed a very strong jap build up in the Davao Gulf area they then wanted us to go to the Leyte island area.*

*We went out again on 15 August bound for Leyte but we encountered a typhoon and almost lost the aircraft because of hail damage. The leading edges of the main plane and tailplane were smashed back to the spar. Radiator ferrules and air coolers were damaged, fabric was stripped from the control surfaces and we made an uncontrolled decent from 30,000 feet to 20,000 feet. When we regained control we found that the stalling speed was 140 knots but at 160 knots the ply surface of the wings was lifting at the spar and was in danger of peeling off!*

*We set out for home and when we thought safe to do so called for assistance. A US Navy air rescue Catalina heard us and followed along our track back to Noemfoor in case we had to ditch or bale out. On arrival at Noemfoor Jeff Love dropped out of the aircraft and kissed the dirty wet coral.*

*We stuffed the leading edges with rags and doped fabric over the rags to repair the leading edges and set off for Darwin and then Bankstown so that de Havillands could examine the aircraft and work a modification for tropical service. The mod consisted of doping rubberised fabric over the leading edges".*

In September 1944, No 1 PRU was accorded squadron status and No 87 (PR) Squadron was formed at Coomalie Creek. After the loss of Mosquito A52-4 and Lightning A55-1, over the previous month, the only aircraft on strength were Mosquito A52-2 and two Wirraways.

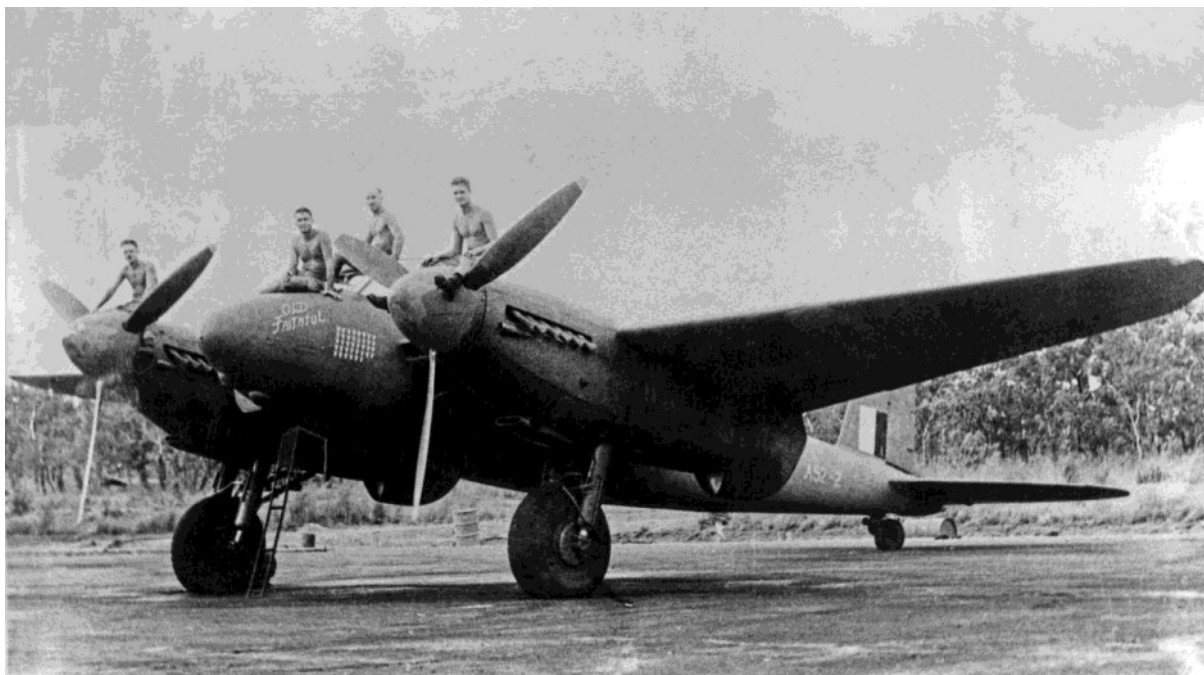
## Mosquito of the month—A52-2



**A52-2 photographed at Moemfoor on 17 August 1944, the day it returned to Darwin for Repair, showing the damage to the leading edge. (c/o David Vincent book)**

Late in the month, more air crews arrived along with another PR Mk 40 Mosquito. Once A52-2 was made serviceable again, further successful flights were completed to Macassar and Masela islands and Koepang.

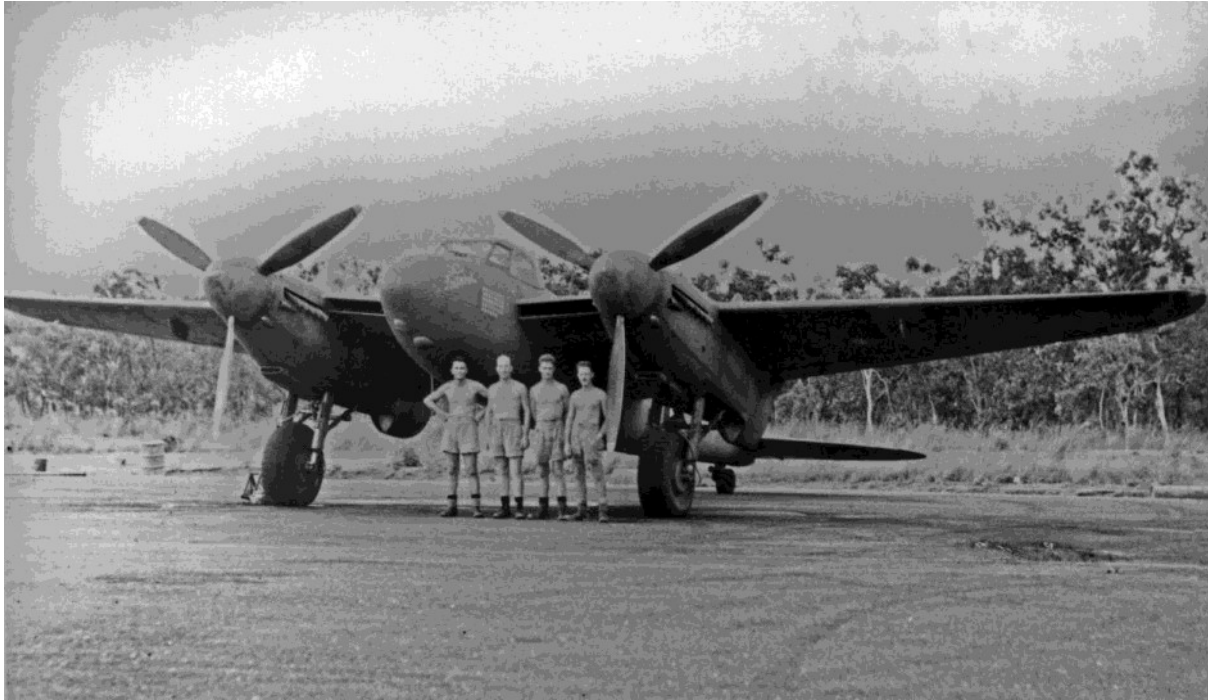
In January 1945, the decision was made that A52-2 be withdrawn from operation due to serviceability issues and sent to 2 AD for breaking-up. On the 2 February 1945, S/L Gamble and FO Lobb departed Coomalie Creek for 2 AD Richmond, NSW, via Canberra (ACT).



**Ground crew members on top of A52-2, Sgt R.B. Baldock (rigger), H. Hopgood (Fitter IIE), J. Stiegrad (flight rigger) and W. Povey (electrician). A52-2 completed 38 sorties and was known as “Old Faithful”, a name which was applied to the aircraft’s nose adjacent to its log of operations by fitter IIA Ern Wenske. 87 PR Squadron, RAAF. C. Dec 1945. Loc: Coomalie Creek, NT. (c/o Ern Wenske)**



## Mosquito of the month—A52-2



Ground crew members in front of FB Mk 40 Mosquito, A52-2. Sgt R.B. Baldock (rigger), H. Hopgood (Fitter IIE), W. Povey (electrician), J. Stiegrad (flight rigger) and W. Povey (electrician). 87 PR Squadron, RAAF. C. Dec 1944. Loc: Coomalie Creek, NT. (c/o Ern Wenske)



A52-2 taxis past Wirraway into the revetment area at Coomalie Creek, probably June 1944. A serious problem affecting the PR Mosquitoes at Coomalie Creek was overheating whilst on the ground. 1 PRU Squadron, RAAF.



# Reginald Spooner

Another stalwart member Reg Spooner has passed away. He succumbed quickly to a bout of pneumonia on Sunday 8th March 2015.

He was 93 years old. Our condolences go to Thelma his wife of 73 years and his sons Raymond, Denis, Neil and their families.

Reg was a very active member of MAAA some years ago. He was a great reference point for photos and being able to recall faces and names which helped David Devenish (our archivist) in so many ways.

During World War 2, he was a Sgt Instrument Maker with No 1 Squadron RAAF Mosquitos.

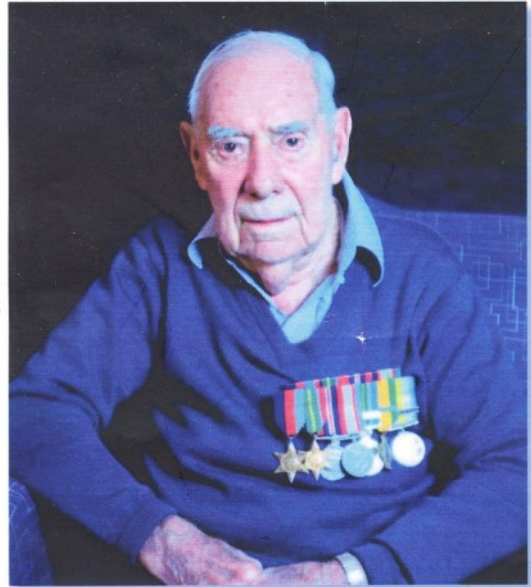
He took on a Committee job about a decade ago to capture a vocal history of people who served in the war especially those at Coomalie Creek.

He would take his trusty voice recorder and visit his comrades, get them talking about their various exploits during WW2.

Thanks for your assistance in capturing history Reg, may you rest in peace.

*Reginald Arthur Spooner*

*14th October 1921 - 8th March 2015*



*"Beautiful memories woven in gold,  
this is the picture we tenderly hold,  
deep in our hearts your memory is kept,  
to love, to cherish and never forget."*

# Grant Burfield

Hello everyone near and far,

For those of you who do not know me I would like to introduce myself. My name is Elle and I am the stepdaughter of Grantley Shayne Burfield. I do apologise for being unable to contact each of you personally, but as Grant's contact list is vast and I wouldn't expect any less as he is the kind of man that everyone wants to be mates with.

My heart breaks telling you all this, Grant passed away around 11:00pm on 5th March 2015. Grant had been diagnosed with lung cancer October last year within a matter of months it was all through his body and caused him extreme pain. I have never seen anything so relentlessly destructive as cancer before and I truly hope I never do again. The one thing that gets us all through each day without him is knowing he is no longer in any pain.

Grants Service will be at Albany Creek Memorial Park on Friday 13/3/15 at 12pm then on to his favourite QLD watering hole Albany Creek Tavern.

There will be a second service in SA around the beginning of May to lay him to rest in the same town as his parents and next to his mother.

I may not have all of Grants contacts so it would be much appreciated if you would let others know so they also have a chance to say goodbye to a great man if they wish.

Elle

elle.br83@gmail.com  
0404 585 530

# Bill Dunstan

Last October, the RAAF museum welcomed two visitors to the restoration hanger, Bill Dunstan and his nephew Laurie John.

Bill was delighted to be re-acquainted with an old friend, A52-600, which he remembers whilst he was stationed at Coomalie Creek, NT.



**Bill Dunstan and Laurie John, in front of A52-600 at RAAF Museum Point Cook, 5 Oct 2014**

Back in December 1944, Bill Dunstan, a young 19 year old leading Aircraftsman, was assigned to No 6 Communications Unit, Darwin. Bill travelled that well-worn route north; by train to Adelaide and then Alice Springs; then by road to Larrimah; then by "Leaping Lena" train to Adelaide River, arriving on Christmas day; and then by road to Batchelor.

A few months later in May 1945, Bill was assigned to 87 PR Squadron.

In those closing months of the war, Bill saw the photographic reconnaissance squadron at its busiest, flying some 30 sorties per month to the north, it's tragedy with the death of S/L Jim Gillespie and the jubilation of the wars end.

David Devenish interviewed Bill and has written a precis of their conversations and interspersed it with archived photos.



In October, Bill went south with the advance party to prepare for the Squadron's move to Parkes, NSW. Only this time Bill went in style, flying south in a liberator.

Bill has kindly provided the Association with a copy of his memorabilia covering his service period from which two items of interest have been included this month.

The first, is a photo of the ground crew assembled in front of a Mk XIV Mosquito along with an identical photo with a legend of names.

Bill had carefully recorded all of their names, which, along with a number of other photos has greatly added to the Association's records.

The second item of interest, is the 1 PRU – 87 (Photo Reconnaissance) Squadron Song.

Amongst Bill's memorabilia was a complete hand written copy of the song. Whilst a verse of this song was published in David Vincent's book 'Mosquito Monograph', the Association has been unable to find a complete copy.

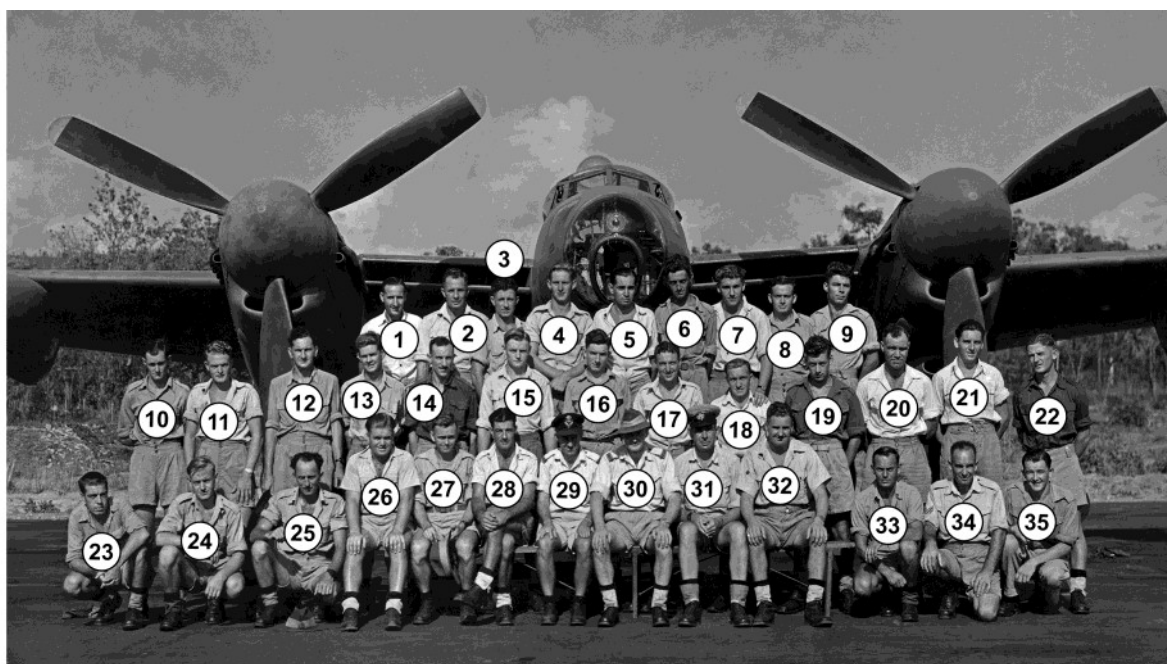
Whilst Bill could not confirm the author(s), he believes it was written by the air crew and that it was sung to the tune of a well known Irish song "Phil the Fluter's Ball", by Percy French.



# Bill Dunstan



**Group portrait of ground crew in front of a PR XVI-Mosquito, 87 PR Squadron, RAAF, August 1945. Location: Coomalie Creek, NT.**



**Legend - group portrait, ground crew, 87 PR Squadron, Coomalie Creek, NT. Aug 1945.**

1- George N. Knebal, 2- Stanley 'Stan' A. Davenport, 3- John J. 'Jack' Savage, 4- Stuart M. 'Snowie' Thomson, 5- 'Dave' Dunn, 6- Unknown, 7- Duncan F. Grey, 8- 'Jack' Skinner, 9- Leo A. Croft, 10- W. J. 'Wally' Quinlivan, 11- Ronald D. 'Ron' Bignal, 12- Allen Larkin, 13- Allen Cook, 14- Hector L. 'Hec' Noel, 15- John Marshall, 16- William 'Bill' Dunstan, 17- Grafton F. R. 'Fred' Nott, 18- James M. 'Jim' Price, 19- Ronald 'Ron' Parry-Williams, 20- Corpl. Allan W. Perrin, 21- Cpl M.G. 'Max' Holmes, 22- 'Jim' Johnson, 23- 'Merv' Wilson, 24- Johannes G. 'John' Nuske, 25- A. Harold Flanders, 26- Dudley J. 'Doug' Porch, 27- John G. C. 'Jack' Thom, 28- Cpl. Frederick R. 'Fred' Robinson, 29- FO Leyster H. 'Les' Briggs, 30- FO Ian H. C. McGregor, 31- WO Rudolf C. 'Rudy' Baker, 32- Flt Sgt McMaster, 33- George W. 'Bill' Jeffs, 34- Sgt 'Ray' Henderson, 35- Cpl Wiseman.

**Legend to group portrait of ground crew in front of a PR XVI-Mosquito, 87 PR Squadron, RAAF, August 1945. Location: Coomalie Creek, NT.**



# Song of three Mosquitos at Coomalie

*Words and music by 'Sand' Williams, COPYRIGHT 2013,  
written and first performed at Coomalie Creek August 2013*

## Three Mosquitoes – Sacred Ground

Three Mosquitoes in August 45  
One went down,  
One turned around,  
One made a victory fire at

*Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Sacred country all around  
Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Where the last Mosquito went down*

Gillespie's Mosquito about to take to the sky  
Then it veered and crashed to the side  
Two on board, Jim would die on August 5 at

*Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Sacred country all around  
Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Where the last Mosquito went down*

Second Mosquito over the Timor Sea  
Ordered back on the fifteenth  
The sun had set on the Japanese  
Mosquito flying low for Victory back at

*Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Sacred country all around  
Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Where the last Mosquito went down*

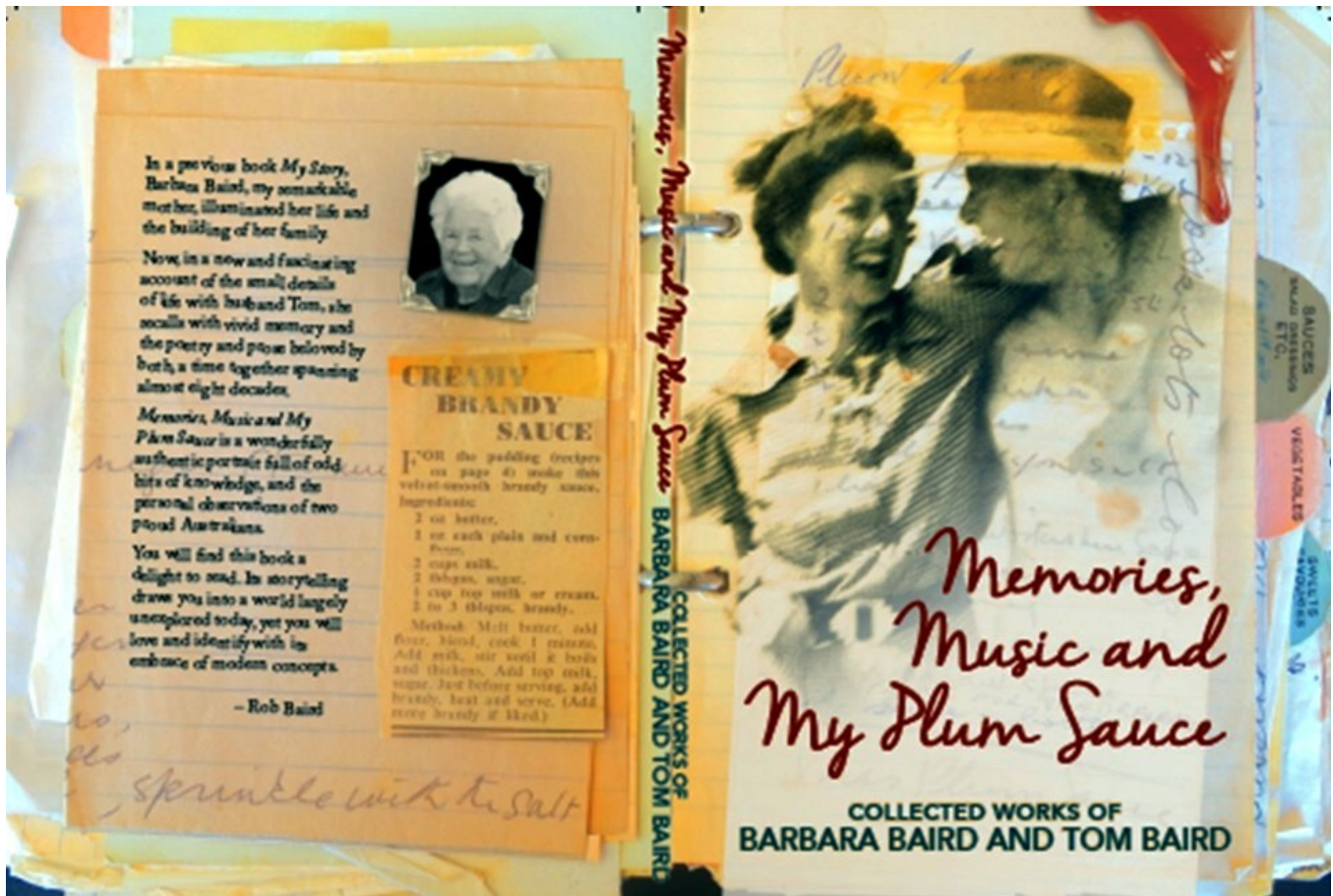
Third old Mosquito made a big bonfire  
Victory flames rising high  
No more bandits in the sky  
No more Zero's cannon fire at

*Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Sacred country all around  
Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Where the last Mosquito went down*

There's a little Chapel where Heaven and earth meet  
Where men gave thanks for being alive  
And prayed for those who'd lived and died at

*Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Sacred country all around  
Coomalie Creek, sacred ground  
Where the last Mosquito went down  
Where Jim's Mosquito came down*

# From the Mailbox



Thank you so much for the write up of my book on page 3 in the previous Bulletin. Attached is a copy of the book cover. If one of our fellow members wishes to obtain a copy -

Please forward: \$30 per copy plus \$6 packaging and postage sent by cheque to:

Barbara Baird,  
31/2 Pine St.,  
Albion Park Rail, NSW 2527.

Kind regards, Barbara Baird



## Point Cook Airfield work

Work has commenced on the upgrade of Point Cook airfield so you will notice machinery and vehicles operating out on the field.

The work package is expected to be completed by late July 2015 and will include refurbishment to the main runway, taxiways, lighting and tarmac. The work on the main runway will affect our general flying activities and hopefully we can accommodate the inconvenience caused.

The major concern for the Museum is when the revamp phase commences on the Museum tarmac; not only will it affect our Interactive Flying

Displays (IFD) but also there will be a requirement to relocate the IFD seating and associated fencing, the C130s, Caribou and HS748 away from the areas affected.

Additionally, there will be an increased vehicular presence accessing the tarmac particularly around the area between the Museum HQ building and the General Engineering Section.

Please be vigilant when moving around the various areas.

Mary Briggs  
RAAF Museum  
Volunteer Co-ordinator



# From the Mailbox

Proof that Malcolm (Mac) Skinner was in the war to the end—an official document validating he had dropped the last bomb on Berlin.

In addition Mac has kindly donated a Mossie print to the MAAA, as he is moving from his house to a retirement home but lacks the wall space to display the painting.

When he was at Richmond Air Force Base for an open day for A52-600 a decade or more ago, he met the artist Edgar



Jackson who invited Mac around to his house to look at his works. Mac told him his story about his war antics, so Edgar gave him the Mossie painting. Edgar died two weeks later after a heart attack.

R.A.F. Station,  
BOURN. Near Cambridge.  
England.  
4th June, 1945.  
Mosquito "A" 105 Squadron  
This is to certify that on the night of April 20/21st, 1945, the last R.A.F. bomb to be dropped on Berlin, was released by F/O. Skinner (Aus), navigator of Mosquito "A" 105 Squadron, which was piloted by F/L. Young (N.Z.)  
Bomb Load :- 4 x 500 L.C. Used .025 secs. Tail Delay.  
Aiming Point :- Alexandre Platz, Centre of Berlin.  
Height:- 28,000 ft.  
I.A.S.:- 166 Knots.  
T.A.S.:- 260 Knots.  
Time of Release:- 0226.2  
Computed Error:- 50 yards.  
Airborne Time:- 4 hours 10 minutes.  
B. E. Smith p/o  
for Senior Intelligence Officer,  
R.A.F. Station, Bourn.

Aus. 435581 F/O M.B. SKINNER - RAAF



New York - 1944 - AGE 19 yrs.



21/4/10 - 85 YEARS.



## From the Mailbox



I have forwarded a photo of John Mills having his birthday celebrations here at Caroon Jarman Hostel in Lismore, his base of current operations.

John had a wonderful day with his family on Sunday 8th and then here at Caroon Jarman proudly showing off his print of the Mosquito.

Thank you once again for your wonderful gift to John he is really taken by it.

Regards  
Garry Corben  
Leisure & Lifestyle Officer | Caroon Jarman  
Hostel North Coast Region | UnitingCare Ageing



Last July I celebrated my 91st year of life on this planet, so I guess my eyes slipped off the ball we call this earthly and troubled planet. However I will subscribe to the memory of this wooden wonder, I am so proud to be a part of its history in all theatres of war.

Now let me tell you my story as to what happened to me on Labuan Island after the sur-

render (which we all witnessed). Thereafter came Gracie Fields, Lord Louis Mountbatten, and the shuffle of personnel who wanted to go to Japan for the occupation forces. Medical orderly Fred Flegg's application was on that listing.

Now Doc Leventhal was without help, as we come to know the Doc served as a medico in a previous stint with No1 Squadron (Beauforts) in the Darwin area. He then made himself available to become our Doctor in the new 1 Squadron Mosquito's that was after the disbandment of the 1 Squadron Beauforts. My brother Lance was also a member of the 1 Squadron Beauforts. I would like to think perhaps this is where I became noticed and trusted to be a replacement for Fred Flegg.

A tent was erected quite near the medical centre, a floor of linoleum and all the comforts I might need, as I was on call 24/7. I would like to recall some of the problems that fell to my judgment. The war is now over, all the lads wanted to be sent home immediately, (not possible). They would come to my tent at all hours of night in tears, mind you many of these were still under 20, wanting to

# From the Mailbox

go home.

To fix this problem Doc W Leventhal mixed a brew that was given in small doses, by the time they reached their tent a good night's rest was assured. Then of course medical parades each morning to treat Tinea, Dermatitis, and other tropical sores. Now of course our leader Ross Little had reason to have the Squadron demobilised. Reason tropical conditions do not suite the wooden aircraft. The Squadron is now demobilised and sent back to Australia.

As I am no longer needed as a fill in medico, I am now transferred to 93 Beaufighter Squadron. The aircraft I am allocated to is flown by P.O Buster Crabbe, a champion bloke to get along with. I now have to adapt from working on V12 Merlin motors to Hercules 14 cylinder radial sleeve valve motors, and top it off having to carry out the work of an 11E qualification still being listed as a Flt Mechanic.

All of the flying was using up surplus rockets, as there were plenty of ship wrecks in the bay to nominate as targets. About this time two Beaufighters were to return to Australia, Buster Crabbe being one and Hans Gray the other. That evening Buster came to my tent and said he wanted me to fly home with him. I said to him that I felt he would need a crew with a higher rank than me. "No", he replied "I want you to fly with me". Well I agreed to fly with him and later he returned to my tent with Sergeants stripes and told to sew them onto my shirts as he said I want you to fly as Sergeant not as an LAC.

We left Labuan Island on 23/12/1945 touching down at Morotai, Biak, Higginsfield, we had breakfast at Higginsfield (Pork and Bean sandwiches). Hans Gray was first to take off and then Buster. Shortly after a call goes out, "Hans I am losing power in my left motor, I'll go back

and give her another go".

Yes, we managed to get off. The next bit of excitement was coming in over the fence at Amberley the port engine stopped dead. However Buster managed to taxi in on one motor to the workshop area. Buster flew Hans to Townsville to spend Christmas with his girlfriend. Now this was all happening on Christmas Eve. I left the "Cheerup Hut" in Brisbane Christmas morning to go out to my aircraft and remedy the lifeless

engine. I found the motor would fire up and idle, but to move the throttle to get more rev's the motor would just die. I assessed that the problem would be in the carburetor, yes - problem solved, a flexible fuel line had hardened and a small piece had broken off and landed on a jet so cutting off the fuel supply.

Now believe me, I had Christmas dinner in the Sergeants Mess. On the 26th we flew to Essendon and then to Narromine. Buster is given his Discharge and now I am given a new pilot FLT Redenback and Navigator Thomas. When introduced he said Redenback's my name just call me Red, a real good bloke.

When he asked about our families and in particular the names of our wives I thought maybe he's OK, but to my surprise next thing there was Dorothy painted on the port engine and Daphne painted on the starboard engine. The 11A's wife was Daphne so now it was check Dorothy or Daphne if there was need. Now we have a new C.O named Carey, not well liked.

To our surprise an old Beaufort arrived flown in by none other than flying instructor FLT Hubble. It was deemed that 93 Squadron pilots should do a refresher course on this aircraft, not accepted lightly by these pilots. Guess who was nominated to carry out the daily inspections, yes, it was L.A.C. Hunt – me. Now as





# From the Mailbox

you might know the pilot sits on his parachute while in flight and should be removed on leaving the aircraft. However pilot Hubble did not do so and he caught me sitting on his chute while doing my daily drill. He was not happy, nor was I, so I gave him my thoughts on the matter (I think I won?).

Now as we know all permanent Air Force personnel at the outbreak of hostilities were given higher ranks, so now at the end of the war they either reverted to their prewar ranks or have the option of discharge. So our C.O Carey had us listed as essential to hold his rank as long as it was possible. I arrived in Adelaide 4PD and discharged 8th July 1946, about twelve months after the war ended.

Keep up the good work, our Mosquito is unique in the history of aviation.

I remain as always dedicated to our cause.

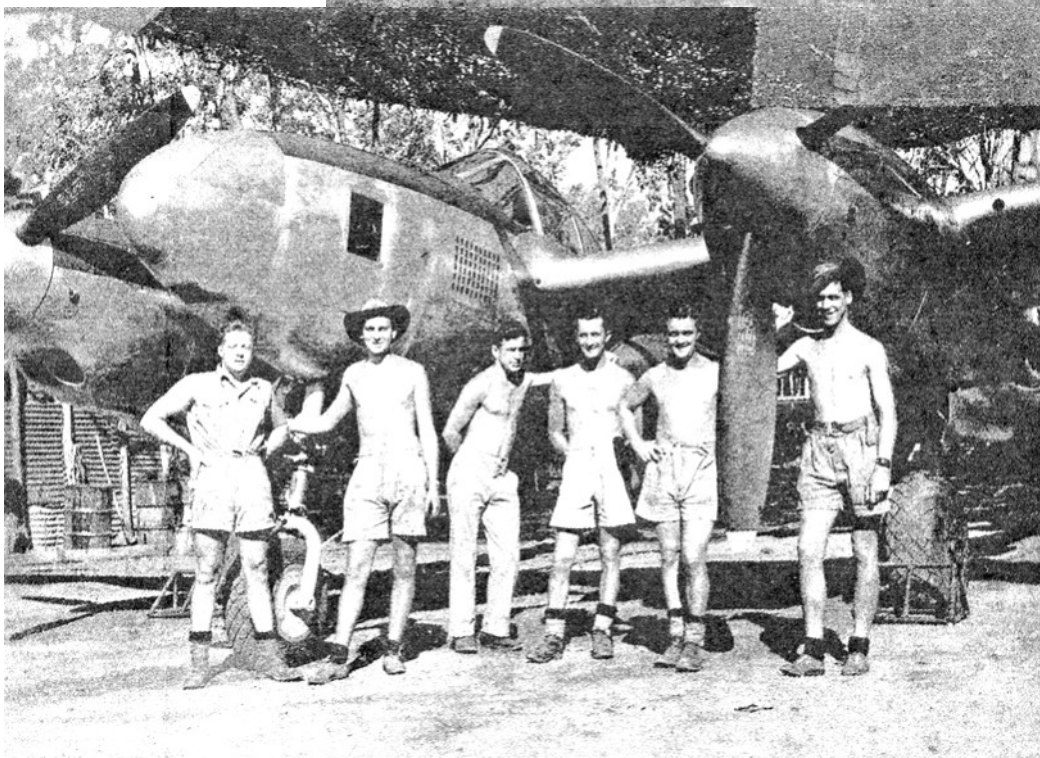
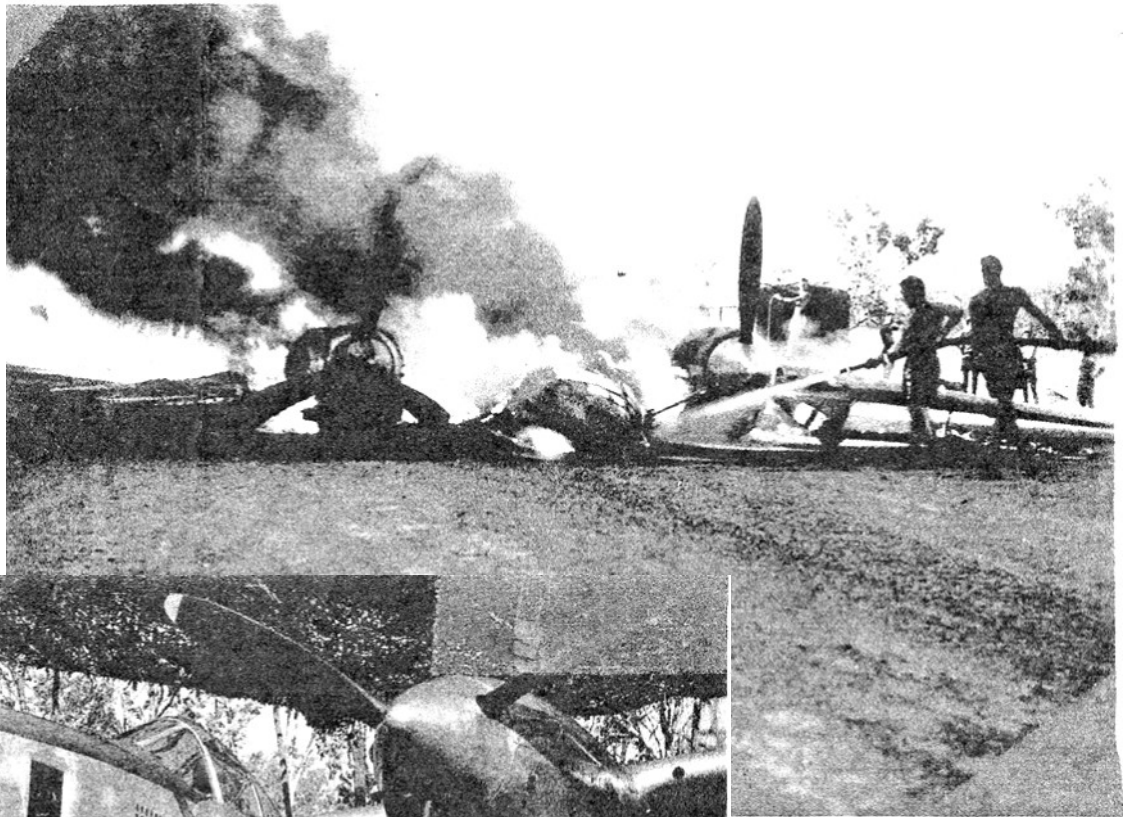


This is the last photograph of Lockheed Lightning's P38 in the RAAF taken at Coomalie Creek, Darwin on 1st September and of her subsequent crash. Note the protection clothing!! worn by the fire personnel of No. 1 PRU.

The pilot FLt John Rush survived the crash but was severely burnt.

At this time the unit was equipped with one Mosquito and two Wirraways and on the 10/9/1944 we became 87 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron.

Keith Chew





# Fuselage and P170 Restoration



The woodworkers Bruce Kean (front), Mike Parkinson, Russell Garraway, John McCrystal are seen here willing the glues to dry and the fuselage to stay in shape.

It has been said they stood there for days, not wanting to be distracted to see the beauty of their creation.

Well done guys and keep up the fabulous effort we have a load of metal bits ready to hang inside. All that is left is a wing...

Section of fuselage stripped to the inner skin and balsa pieces re-added using epoxy resins to ensure the skin holds together. The 'Wednesday Warriors' will eventually recover the fuselage in the same manner and then add the outer skin to finish off the reconstruction once again using long lasting glues.



"David Devenish's" handymen completing the MAAA sections of Hut P170 ready for occupation and storage of items.

The happy faces of Ron Gillis, David Devenish, Eddie Wassanear, Don Taylor, Pat Dulhunty, Peter Lewis and Terry Burke are ready to do things more interesting like have a cup of coffee.

The Hut should be ready for occupation in another month.



# 31 Sqdn Beaufighters

Greg Mann, Secretary of the 31Sqdn Association contacted the Committee to discuss more about the history of Coomalie Creek seeing that they were stationed there along with 1 Sqdn and 87 Sqdn.

They have some photos which the MAAA have not seen before and most likely vice versa.

Now for a bit of 31 Sqdn history:

No 31 Squadron was formed at RAAF Base Wagga Wagga, Forest Hill, New South Wales on the 14th August 1942, and were equipped with Bristol Beaufighter aircraft. On 3rd November 1942, and after a period of training, the squadron moved to Coomalie Creek in the Northern Territory.

On the 17th November 1942, the squadron conducted its first operational sortie from its new base, when six aircraft raided Japanese positions in the Timor. The Squadron operated predominantly from Coomalie Creek Airfield for the next two years, from where it flew operations attacking Japanese shipping, shore installations, and Japanese airfields.

On the 26th November 1944, the squadron briefly relocated to Noemfoor Island before moving to Morotai in December, to join 22 and 30 Squadrons as part of 77 Wing, 1st Tactical Air Force. From Morotai, the squadron conducted strikes on Japanese troop concentrations, shipping, stores and airfields in the Hal-

maheras, Celebes and Borneo area of operations.

The Squadron moved to Tarakan in May 1945 from where it flew its final operation on the 1st of August 1945.

When hostilities ceased on the 15th of August 1945, the Squadron had flown 2,660 offensive sorties, and claimed 20 enemy aircraft destroyed, two probably destroyed, and 14 damaged in the air as well there were 54 aircraft destroyed and 32 damaged on the ground; with nine ships destroyed and four damaged.

On the 6th of July 1946, No 31 Squadron was disbanded at RAAF Williamtown, NSW.

If our readers know of any Mosquito or Beaufighter photos or documentation, both Associations would gladly be the recipients of the original or copies.

Please contact David Devenish for 87 Squadron Mossies on

[ddev@bigpond.com](mailto:ddev@bigpond.com)

Or Beaufighters on

[GregMann@AcquireProperty.com.au](mailto:GregMann@AcquireProperty.com.au)

Or in general Terry Burke on

[burketr9@bigpond.net.au](mailto:burketr9@bigpond.net.au)



# Vale

It is with regret the Association must relay that the following members have past away since the last Bulletin was published.

**Grantley Shayne BURFIELD of Albany Creek, Queensland on 5th March 2015**  
**Reginald Arthur SPOONER of Bundoora, Victoria on 8th March 2015**

## New Members

No new Members have joined since the last Bulletin was published.

How about persuading other rellies, friends or acquaintances to join us?

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