

COOLAMON & DISTRICT WORLD WAR TWO CASUALTIES

(Research by David McCann)

Warrant Officer I.V. (Ivan) Leslie Baker

Ivan Baker enlisted into the RAAF and following aircrew training as a Wireless/Air Gunner and subsequently joined No 179 Squadron (RAF), part of Coastal Command in England. On 31 May 1945, Ivan Baker was part of a crew of a 179 Squadron Lancaster on a non-operational sortie in the south of England when the aircraft was reported to have crashed into the sea. Five of the crew were rescued however two of the crew, including Ivan Baker were killed in the crash.



Gunner J.W. (Jim) Conquest

Jim Conquest was a member of the 2/15th Field Artillery Regiment and had served in the Middle east before his regiment was sent to defend Singapore from the Japanese.



By 13 February 1942 the battle for Singapore Island was all but over and on 15 February, British forces surrendered. Two days later, the regiment began moving from Tanglin Golf Course to Selerang Barracks, Changi, into Japanese capture. For the next three-and-a-half years the men of the regiment had to endure the brutality of being a prisoner of war of the Japanese.

Initially imprisoned in the sprawling Changi prisoner-of-war camp, it was not long before the first parties were dispatched around Singapore and southern Malaya, later members of the 2/15th found themselves members of parties bound for the camps along the Thailand-Burma Railway and in Borneo, Japan, French Indochina, Java, Sumatra, and Malaya. These men endured the worst horrors of Japanese captivity. Of the 556 officers and men who became prisoners, 294 died. The surviving prisoners were liberated in late August 1945 and began returning to Australia almost immediately.

Jim Conquest died as a POW on or about 28th September 1943 on the Thai-Burma railroad. Like so many of his comrades, he has no known grave.

Gunner G.A. (George) Crocker

George Abraham Crocker was born in Coolamon on 5th September 1922. He enlisted for service in World War 2 on 22nd July 1942, joining the 34th Anti-Aircraft Battery. George Crocker died of illness on 3rd May 1943 on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.



The 34th Australian Anti-aircraft Battery was located at King's Point on Horn Island in far north Queensland between 1942 and 1944. The unit was formed under the command of Major Tom Rusden in Braybrook, Victoria on the 1st September 1942. The Battery was the first anti-aircraft battery to arrive on Horn Island and was split into two sections. A Section was located on Double Hill and B Section was located at King Point. The Battery protected a forward RAAF Airfield which was used to raid Japanese targets.

Flight Sergeant Kenneth Dyce

460 Squadron Lancaster W4984 took off from RAF Binbrook at night on 23 May 1943 to attack Dortmund, Germany with a bomb load of 1 x 4000lb bomb, 48 x 30lb and 540 x 4lb incendiaries. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after take-off and it did not return to base. Twenty-four aircraft from the squadron took part in the raid.



Crew:

RAAF 405966 Flt Sgt Beresford Milton Troy Davis Captain
(Pilot) KIA

RAAF 412411 Flt Sgt Kenneth Douglas Dyce (Navigator) KIA

RAAF 405849 Flt Sgt /Clarence Goldthorpe, (Bomb Aimer)
POW

RAAF 411839 Flt Sgt Jack Stanley Biffen (Wireless Operator Air Gunner) KIA

RAF 1040539 Sgt Eric Rowlands (Flt Engineer) KIA

RAAF 421066 Flt Sgt Charles Sinclair Wright (Air Gunner) KIA

RCAF R/152317 Sgt Frederick Wilson Ralph (Air Gunner) KIA

Post war it was established that the aircraft crashed near Oud Schoonebeek (Drenthe), 14kms SSE of Emmen Holland.

FSGT Goldthorpe was interned in Camp(s) L6/357, POW No.1479.

FSGT Goldthorpe who became a POW reported that “the aircraft was attacked by a night fighter. The port engines and wing were on fire. Orders to abandon were given by gestures. The controls appeared damaged. Two baled out at 18,000 feet. I landed near the German Holland border, and was handed over to the Germans. I was told later that all the other six crew members were killed.”

All the six crew members are buried in the Oud Schoonebeek General Cemetery, Netherlands.

FSGT Ken Dyce was just 21 years old at the time of his death. He was the son of Colin Stuart Dyce and Alice Elizabeth Dyce, of Coolamon, New South Wales, Australia.

Gunner N.D. (Norman) Eyles



The 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment was an Australian Army anti-tank artillery regiment that was raised for service during the Second World War as part of the all-volunteer Second Australian Imperial Force. It was formed in July 1940, and was assigned to the 8th Division, but was later reassigned to the 9th Division. With this formation, the regiment took part in the Siege of Tobruk in 1941 and then the First and Second Battles of El Alamein in 1942. Norman Eyles was killed in action on 24th July 1942 during the first Battle of El Alamein. He is buried in the Hadra War Cemetery, Alexandria Egypt.

Private R.A. (Roy) Grinly

Roy Grinly enlisted on the 3rd November 1939 and joined the 2/4th Infantry Battalion. Arriving in the Middle East on 14 February 1940, the 2/4th trained in Palestine and Egypt in preparation for its first campaign, against the Italians in eastern Libya. The battalion played only a small role at Bardia (3-5 January 1941) but was more active during the battle for Tobruk (21-22 January 1941), and had to fight particularly hard to secure the Wadi Derna (26-30 January). It was during the fighting at Bardia that Roy Grinly was killed in action on 2nd January 1941.



Privates R.H. (Ray) Harris & G. (George) McNabb

Ray Harris enlisted on 28 June 1940 and George McNabb on the 19th June 1940 and both men joined the 2/19th Infantry Battalion. The battalion was sent to defend Singapore and engaged the advancing Japanese Imperial Army. The 2/19th stood to arms on the night of 6 December 1941 but a month would pass before the first of its



men were in action. On 7 January D Company was detached to form half a special force deployed to delay the Japanese approach to Endau, a town further north along the coast. One of its platoons was involved in a clash with the Japanese on 14 January 1942. D Company returned to the battalion in time for its redeployment to the west coast on 17 January. The 2/19th was rushed forward to reinforce the beleaguered 2/29th Infantry Battalion at Bakri. It held the vital crossroad there throughout 19 January, long enough to allow for the withdrawal of the remnants of the 2/29th and the 45th Indian Brigade from the

direction of Muar. The Japanese had already outflanked the 2/19th's position, however, and on the morning of 20 January a torturous withdrawal towards Parit Sulong commenced. The force managed to fight its way through a succession of Japanese roadblocks, while constantly harried from its rear and from the air but was halted by strong positions around the bridge across the Simpang Kiri River at Parit Sulong.

During this action, on George McNabb is presumed to have been wounded or killed in action. His remains were never found.

With its ammunition exhausted, casualties mounting, and no chance of relief, the force struck out through the jungle for Yong Peng on the morning of 23 January. It was forced to leave its wounded behind; they were subsequently massacred by the Japanese.

Only 271 of the nearly 800 members of the 2/19th were mustered at Yong Peng and withdrawn to Johore Bahru. There, on 26 January the battalion received 650 reinforcements, and re-organisation and training commenced. It crossed onto Singapore Island on 31 January and took up defensive positions on the left of the 22nd Brigade's sector on the island's west coast. The wide frontage it was required to cover, however, meant its platoons and sections had to be widely dispersed. When the Japanese launched their invasion on the night of 8 February the 2/19th's position was readily infiltrated and the battle degenerated into vicious scattered engagements in the dark. Like most Australian units involved, it fell into a desperate retreat that ended with surrender on the outskirts of Singapore city on the night of 15 February 1942.

Initially imprisoned in the sprawling Changi prisoner of war camp, it was not long before members of the 2/19th were allocated to external work parties. The largest of these groups was D Force, which was sent to work on the Burma-Thailand railway. Lesser numbers were dispatched with other parties bound for the railway and to camps in Borneo, Japan, French Indochina, Java, Sumatra, and Malaya. The surviving prisoners were liberated in late-August 1945 and began returning to Australia almost immediately. The 2/19th was formally disbanded later in 1945, having suffered the highest casualties of any Australian Army unit during war.

Ray Harris died of illness on or about 20th June 1943 while a Prisoner of War and is interned in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand.

Flying Officer David Johnstone

FLGOFF David Johnstone was a RAAF Flying Instructor attached to 15 (Pilot) Advanced Training Unit which was formed in August 1940 as part of No. 6 Group RAF Bomber Command at RAF Harwell to train night bomber crews on the Vickers Wellington. In 1942 the unit carried out seven operational missions. On 20 July 1943, David Johnstone was instructing a trainee pilot when the aircraft crashed. Most of Flying Officer Johnstone's training for the RAAF was undertaken in Rhodesia. On his way to England his ship was torpedoed. He landed in British West Africa after spending 12 days in an open boat. After arriving in England, he flew operational missions against targets in Germany before becoming a flying instructor.



Flight Sergeant A.E. (Alfred) Lewis



FSGT Alfred Lewis was the Pilot of a No 75 Squadron (NZ) Stirling Bomber (R9290 AA-X) which took off from RAF station Newmarket on the night of 28/29 April 1943 as part of a huge 207 aircraft mine laying operation which saw a total of 593 mines laid of Heligoland, in the river Elbe and in Great and Little Belts. Although this was the largest mine laying operation in one night of the whole war it came at a price. A total of 22 aircraft were lost (75 Squadron lost 4 aircraft alone with a total of 28 crew killed). 9 aircraft were lost by night fighters and the remainder from the flak.

The aircraft flown by Alfred Lewis was hit by marine flak when flying very low at 330 metres. The aircraft is understood to have been hit in the left inboard engine and also along the fuselage. The aircraft crashed into the sea some 300 metres off shore and exploded on impact around 00:23hrs. There were no survivors. The seven-man crew Killed in Action were:

- FSGT A.E. Lewis RAAF (Pilot) (25 yrs.) Coolamon, NSW
- SGT A. Graham RAFVR (Flight Engineer)
- SGT Henry George Corin RNZAF (Navigator) (35yrs)
- FLGOFF Charles John Bickham RAF (Bombardier)
- SGT Moulton RAFVR (Wireless/Air Gunner) (23 yrs.)
- SGT John Whitehart RAFVR (Air Gunner) (23 yrs.)
- SGT Victor Charles Howes RNZAF (Air Gunner) (20 yrs.)

Flight Sergeant F. (Francis) Maloney

On 20 May 1944, 100 Squadron made a mass raid on Lakunai Aerodrome, Rabaul, with Beaufort Bomber aircraft. Participating in this operation was the crew comprising 416874 Pilot Officer Lyle Manhire McLaren (Pilot A/C Captain), of Largs Bay, SA; 410192 Pilot Officer Sydney Louis Anderson (Navigator) of Canterbury, Vic; 410995 Flight Sergeant Francis Maloney (Wireless/Air Gunner) of Coolamon, NSW; 417175 Flying Officer Raymond Arnold Graetz (Wireless/Air Gunner) of Springton, SA. This crew were shot down on operations over Wewak, New Guinea in Beaufort Bomber A9-571. Flying Officer Graetz was the only survivor of the crash and was able to evade capture,



eventually returning to his unit and being awarded the Military Cross on 21 September 1944.

The official RAAF Inquiry found that:

'...On May 20, 1944 at 8:42 am took off from Tadjji Airfield piloted by F/O Lyle M. McLaren as one of nine Beauforts on bombing mission against Wom Point to Suain. Over the target, this Beaufort was hit by anti-aircraft fire and ditched into the sea in the vicinity of Wom Point. The crew deployed the life raft and paddled towards shore.

Near shore, their raft was fired on by an enemy machine gun. The first burst killed Anderson. The second burst holed the raft and the three remaining crew started to swim alongside. The third burst collapsed the raft and killed McLaren and wounded Graetz who started swimming out to sea. The fate of Maloney is unknown, either died with the aircraft or was killed...'

Sergeant S.J. (Joe) Marriage

Lancaster DV160 of Number 460 Squadron took off at 22.57 hrs. from RAF Station Binbrook on 14 June 1943. It was shot down by a German night-fighter and crashed at 02.21 hrs. at Schellingwoude (Noord Holland) in the north eastern suburbs of Amsterdam, where those who died rest in the city's New Eastern Cemetery.

Killed in Action were:

Sgt R E Crooke

Sgt S J Marriage RAAF (Coolamon, NSW)

Sgt C R Buckeridge RAAF

Sgt C E Grimshaw

Sgt G W G Fletcher

Sgt D R Grant RAAF

Made a Prisoner of War (POW) was:

Sgt J R Morrison RAAF



Signaller W.H. (Bill) Moncrieff

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prisoners were liberated in late August 1945 and began returning to Australia almost immediately.

Bill Moncrieff died on or about 2nd September 1943 as a Prisoner of War.

Private L.A. (Leonard) Munro

NX38435 Private Leonard Alfred Munro, 2/10th Field Ambulance, Australian Army Medical Corps. He was one of over 2000 Allied prisoners of war (POW) held in the Sandakan POW camp in north Borneo, having been transferred there from Singapore as a part of B Force. The 1494 POW's that made up B Force, were transported from Changi on 7 July 1942 on board the tramp ship Ubi Maru, arriving in Sandakan Harbour on 18 July 1942. Private Munro, aged 23, died as a prisoner of the Japanese on 1 June 1945. He was the son of John Thomas Munro and Elizabeth Amelia Munro, of Coolamon, NSW. He is commemorated on the Labuan Memorial Panel 26.



Flight Sergeant D.S. (Dennis) Nest



On 10 November 1943 after carrying out a photo recce of the Stampalia and Cos area, (Italy) the crew of FA669:O, a Martin 187 Baltimore twin-engine light attack bomber reported sighting an invasion fleet of 14 landing craft escorted by seven aircraft. The aircraft was lost to subsequent enemy action, killed were Flight Sergeant John Joiner (20) , Flight Sergeant Joseph Gilvarry (21), Flight Sergeant John May (22) , and Flight Sergeant Dennis Nest (23).

Private Maurice Nimmo

Private Maurice Nimmo enlisted on 28 June 1940 and joined the 2/19th Infantry Battalion. The battalion was sent to defend Singapore and engaged the advancing Japanese Imperial Army. The 2/19th stood to arms on the night of 6 December 1941 but a month would pass before the first of its men were in action. On 7 January D Company was detached to form half a special force deployed to delay the Japanese approach to Endau, a town further north along the coast. One of its platoons was involved in a clash with the Japanese on 14 January 1942. D Company returned to the battalion in time for its redeployment to the west coast on 17 January. The 2/19th was rushed forward to reinforce the beleaguered 2/29th Infantry Battalion at Bakri. It held the vital crossroad there throughout 19 January, long enough to allow for the withdrawal of the remnants of the 2/29th and the 45th Indian Brigade from the direction of Muar. The Japanese had already outflanked the 2/19th's position, however, and on the morning of 20 January a torturous withdrawal towards Parit Sulong commenced. The force managed to fight its way through a succession of Japanese roadblocks, while constantly harried from its rear and from the air but was halted by strong positions around the bridge across the Simpang Kiri River at Parit Sulong. During this action on 22nd January, Maurice Nimmo is presumed to have been wounded or killed in action. His remains were never found. With its ammunition exhausted, casualties mounting, and no chance of relief, the force struck out through the jungle for Yong Peng on the morning of 23 January. It was forced to leave its wounded behind; they were subsequently massacred by the Japanese.

(No photograph available. Any assistance would be appreciated).

Private L.A. (Lance) Tipping

Private Lance Tipping Embarking for Singapore on 2 February 1941 with the 2/20 Infantry Battalion. On 7 January 1942, C Company was detached to form part of a special unit to delay the Japanese advance at Endau on the north coast, clashing with the Japanese on a number of occasions before withdrawing to the battalion main defensive position at Mersing on 26 January. Meanwhile, the remainder of the battalion at Mersing also clashed with the Japanese on a number of occasions and was heavily



bombed. After being rejoined by C Company, the 2/20th Battalion withdrew to Singapore Island on 31 January, where it took up positions on the northern flank of the brigade sector. In the week following the withdrawal from Malaya, the battalion received an influx of about 80 reinforcements, who were largely untrained having been shipped hastily from Australia with little regard to their preparedness, to make up for earlier losses. When the Japanese assaulted the island on 8 February 1942, the main assault saw the 2/20th bearing the brunt of the initial attack. Stretched across a brigade-sized frontage of 7,000 yards (6,400 m), which ran north along the coast from the Serimbun River to the Kranji River, and which included the Namazie Estate, an airfield and the main supply route that ran along the sealed Lim Chu Kang road, the 2/20th Battalion's lines, held by a total of about 750 men, were eventually infiltrated by the assaulting Japanese. After initially inflicting heavy casualties on the Japanese the battalion, threatened with encirclement, was forced to withdraw to a new position along Lim Chu Road. Although still intact, it was apparent that this position would shortly be overwhelmed and the battalion was again ordered to move south, during which it became scattered. The initial Japanese assault cost the battalion heavily. Casualties on the first night amounted to 334 killed and 214 wounded. Lance Tipping was Killed in Action on 8th February 1942 during heavy fighting with Japanese forces.

Gunner J.E. (John) Withers



John Withers, a native of Marrar was a member of the 2/1 Machine Gun Battalion. At the start of 1941 the battalion moved into camp at Ikingi Maryutand undertook desert training. In early April it left Ikingi for Greece to support the 6th Division. A few days after arriving in Athens the 2/1st headed for Gerania in the north to support different units manning the Aliakmon line: A Company joined the 2/4th Battalion, north of the Aliakmon river; B and C Companies were allocated to the 4th New Zealand Brigade; and D Company went to the 17th Brigade at Kalabaka. The machine-gunners fought alongside the infantry for the rest of the campaign and evacuated

between the end of April and the beginning of May. A small group from battalion headquarters evacuated first, returning directly to Alexandria. Elements from A Company (less a section), B Company (less 9 Platoon), and C Company boarded the Costa Rica, which was sunk by German aircraft shortly after. The men were rescued and taken to Crete by accompanying naval destroyers but most of their equipment and machine-guns were lost. Meanwhile, B and D Companies were also evacuated to Crete. D Company, which still had its guns, was sent to the 19th Brigade in the Georgioupolis area and the rest of the battalion went into camp in the Suda area. On 12 May B Company's 7 Platoon also went to Georgioupolis and the rest of the battalion returned to Egypt.

The men in the Georgioupolis area were stationed along the beach and on to Retimo. When the Germans began their attack on Crete on 20 May the Australians reorganised their defences and the machine-gunners grouped around Canea and Retimo. Bitter fighting ensued as more and more German paratroopers landed on the island. It was during this fighting that John (Jack) Withers was killed in action.

Lest We Forget