

Murray Lyne Skinner Squadron: 683 RAF Rank: Squadron Leader Number: 407686

Murray, or Lyne as he was known to his friends, was born on the 16th May 1921 in Dulwich, South Australia. He enlisted in the RAAF on the 5th December 1940 at the grand old age of 19 and 7/12ths as he so succinctly put it, and his last posting was with RAF 683 Squadron PRU (Photo Reconnaissance Unit) flying Spitfire, based at San Severa, Italy.

During the War, he started out as a Leading Aircraftman and rose to Squadron Leader in rank. He said he was thankfully decorated with the Returned Serviceman's badge. He trained in Pearce and Cunderdin in Western Australia, Fort McLeod in Alberta, Canada, Sommertown on Prince Edward Island in Canada, Lyneham in Wiltshire, and Chivenor and Devon, all in the UK.

He has flown many aircraft, including operationally on the Bristol Beaufort (a torpedo bomber with a crew of four), the Martin Baltimore (a twin light attack bomber with a crew of four) and the Supermarine Photo Reccy Spitfire Mk. X1. He served in the Western Desert in Egypt, and in Malta and Italy.

The main photo is of Lyne on a stopover with Alexandria Harbour in Egypt.

In Lyne's own words, his Spitfire activities were as follows:

"In 1943, when I completed my first tour (350 hours) doing numerous sorties of operations, partly in Bristol (Torpedo) Beauforts and then in Martin Baltimores at low level (anything from 15 feet to 1,500 feet in anti submarine operations, dinghy search and reconnaissance, I suffered from TEP (Time Expired Pilot's Disease) and was directed to recuperate with 14 days leave in Taomina, Sicily. I obtained a lift in a Mosquito and the pilot showed me the marvels of the Mosquito by feathering one engine and flying directly vertically. I was impressed so much that I knew I wanted to fly Mosquitoes for the second tour.

I then found one could only get to Mosquitoes after doing a Photo Reconnaissance (PR) Course, and that was only given on Spitfires at Petah Tiqva, Palestine. So while "resting" at Gianacis in Egypt, in charge of an Anson Flight teaching Navigators and Gunners, I got some hours in flying the Bolton Paul Defiant towing the drogue. This was to give me some single engine hours to permit me to be accepted for a transfer to Spitfires at the PRU at Petah, Tiqva in Palestine – which I did in October 1944.

My first trip in a Spitfire was very exciting, as when opening the throttle the torque veered the aircraft to the right unless quickly corrected. Therefore, one got the tail raised as quickly as possible. As most sorties in my case were between 22,000 feet and 28,000 feet, oxygen was turned on before take-off. I cannot recall the rate of climb, but it was very high.

In the PR Spitfire, there was provision for 5", 8" and 14" focal length cameras, both vertical and at a slope, and 36" cameras used vertically. Those with the magazine of about 14" square and 10" high were all located behind the pilot. (Web Master: An inch equals 2.54 cm) Normally, there were two cameras set side by side, taking pictures of each target six times if flying straight and level, i.e. three times with each camera. To focus the 36" vertical cameras, one had to get close to the start point and then stand on the wing tip, to gauge if one was vertically over the target start point. Then one had to set the timer. When completed, check by getting on to the wingtip again to ensure one was still over the target run. If one was not over the finish point, it had to be re-run. (Web Master: Because the cameras were located behind the pilot, it wasn't like looking through a gunsight. Lyne would have had to roll on 90 degrees of bank to visually check his position. It was all eyeball and seat of the pants stuff.)

In January 1945, I was posted to 683 Squadron operating from San Severa in Italy. They were flying Mark X1 and and later, the Mark XVIII. This was the Squadron whose C/O was Wingco Adrian "Warby" Warburton, the notorious and lucky ace whose body and wrecked plane was located in the year 2007, in Germany. I carried out sorties to Genoa, Spezia (2 hours), Udine, Venice (4 hours) and the Central Alps (3 hours 25 min). I flew on Jan 4th, 15th, 21st and 25th from the San Severa base.

Lyne's photo is of the last of the "Otto Leonhart", which was landing ammunitions and mines and artillery for the enemy at the shipping docks in Venice

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On the 28th January 1945, I was sent to the Detachment at Forli on the south edge of the Po Valley, just North West of Rimini, where we had six Mark X1 aircraft with two 36" lens, and six pilots and 60 ground crew. Our sorties varied from 40 min to 2 hours 35 mins, and from 20,000 feet to 27,000 feet. I had one 35 minute climb for a camera test to 38,500 feet, taking line overlaps and mosaics.

We were under direct and full orders from the Army Italy East side. Our sorties covered their needs at the front line. The purpose was to find any and all troop or equipment movements. The most frequent job was to photo at first photograph-light, the retreating enemy's self propelled guns that had been firing over the heads of our troops all night. We had to roughly identify their position and get the photos back to PhIS (Photo Interpretation Section) ASAP, where the army was on hand to read the developed film, locate the guns and their position, and direct their guns to fire on them. These were flown at generally 25,500 feet to save valuable time, whenever possible. We had to dispense with the low flying need to get accustomed to the proximity of the ground before landing, so generally we split our landings to save time. The Erks were always on the runway as we turned off to a taxi strip, ready to collect the magazine and to hop on the wing and guide us to our taxi base. Don't forget that the engine obscures forward vision, as it rises to many inches above the line of sight

I recall one landing, when on the last 100 ft, I saw a Spitfire had landed moving towards me – wrong way- and then another in front of me landing in my direction. They collided, tearing off a wing from each. I simply gunned and landed deeper along the runway.

Other sorties were daily coverage of the coast line to Trieste and all the large towns in Croatia, and North Italy – Venice, Le Maestre, Graz, Padua, Adige Ridge Defences, Commachio, Imola, Luga, Bologna. Generally they were one to two-and-a-half hours, mostly it seems at 25,000 ft to 28,000 ft. Once, my engine started running rough and tough. I called Mayday, "Bromide 21 to Mailchain" and was guided from 28,000 ft down to 300ft – yes, 300 ft. I finished up being instructed to circle and lower height and look for the sea. At 500 ft, I could see nothing, and still circling. At 300 ft, I saw the sea and was told I was in a bay between high ground and had to land at Jesi, a few miles inland from Ancona (near the calf of the leg of Italy) which I did successfully. After a change of many plugs, I took off and flew back to Treviso.

On the 27th February 1945, I was appointed Officer in Command Detachment, as Flight Lieutenant Alan Lackey, RAF, was posted home to UK. At Forli, we were housed in two two-story units, one for the Erks and the other for the mess, which was downstairs, and the pilots quarters upstairs. Kegs of Marsala were always expensive for the officers and pilots to fund. We encountered a lot of snow times when we could not fly, which was when we got bored doing nothing. Our entertainment was a flicks night, when we had to get into the dark hall two hours before the start of the film and wait for them to start the Jap motor to run the projector. Non smokers found they soon smoked.

I remember and from my diary, the pilots were Peebles, Mc Laughlin, McFarlane, Standell, Bilton, Alan Walker and 'Blue' Sharman (a redhead) from New South Wales. (I saw him again by chance in 1950 on Anzac Day march, in Sydney – the day that was raining too heavily to march but the WW1 boys marched anyway)

Forli landing strip had the bombed remains of many large buildings which indicated it must have been a busy airport, pre war. I recall on one occasion, when there was a strong cross wind, most unusual, and I had to crab in with much motor but without flaps, a little difficult, and care was needed as there was an ammunition store just off the runway. I was on the last tight approach, very low, probably 30 feet and concentrating on crabbing in sufficiently when I suddenly noticed over my right shoulder, a chimney flash past above me. It was a chimney in a brick factory and it was a very near miss. Just another case of being lucky yes many mostly lucky occasions!!

On Detachment, I flew sorties on Jan 29th (2), 30th and 31st. In Feb on 4th, 7th, and 13th while in March, every day from 4th. In April, I flew to down to Luqa and then Kalafrana in Malta to attend a

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Management Course in preparation for returning to civvy street. I returned to Treviso on the 29th April to resume duties as they were.

In May we had three Squadron moves; 2nd May to El Russia (Ferrara), 5th May to Treviso, (8th May VE Day in Venice) and the 16th May to Tizzano Udine. I flew three sorties on the 5th 10th and 18th, covering roads in Treviso, Klagenfurt, Trieste, Gorizia, and Volkenstrat (Austria) at 25,500 ft. We also (in May) moved up closer to the front line, to Russia (Ferrara) and still visited the same targets; Ljubjano, Graz, Klagenfert, in Yugoslavia, Trieste and Gorizia in Italy. When we moved to Ferrara, we had to land on what was left of the runway splattered with bomb holes but mostly "filled in". One had to fly in wheels down, full flap, heavy revs, and look for a clear space and stall the kite with a three pointer to cut speed, all this with minimum forward vision. When we moved up to Treviso (Tizzano) just north of Venice, we took the fornacatorium, the square open roofed gharry (a horse drawn carriage), which carried 10 to 15 bods, each night full of Erks, and we had a few hours in Venice. We headed for the long causeway from Le Maestra to Venice where we had to park the gharry in the only garage in town, and walk over the "roadways" of water to St Mark Square and to the Hotel Danielle. When we noticed the motorised "speed" boats coming to the nearby landing, we waited and welcomed the Germans coming in to town, unknowing of the Peace deal, so we relieved them of their watches, cameras and German Currency, and told them to go find an MP and tell them their war was over. We were walking through a Venice Square and getting back to the gharry when Peace was declared and we heard over the Tannoy (a brand of loudspeaker) "La guera il Europa il a finito". That was wonderful news, **but** we had to continue checking on General Tito in Yugoslavia.

My last operational flight was on the 18th May, 1945 and my last flight was on the 23rd May, 1945. My flying time totalled 1,114 hours 35 minutes and all of this between the 7th February 1941 and the 7th February 1945. I had completed 33 operations in 55 hours in Spitfires Mark X1 PR, plus 14 non-operational hours. In all my Spitfire sorties, I found no evidence that I was detected by the enemy, and not attacked except on one photo run when an American Mustang decided to head me on and I had to cut and run. That was my only encounter, I am pleased to say.

As I had become supernumery on the Detachment and the end seemed to be imminent, and with the idea of going **home**, for the second time, on the 22nd May, I flew across Italy into Naples and applied and obtained a posting back to UK. But then I found that no Aussies were permitted to proceed west, so I had to wait for a ship. After this trip, I flew to Guado and then to Foggia, both in Italy. There, I had had the choice of getting a posting home when I finished my first tour, but it was then I made my first decision in the RAAF and I chose to stay in the Mediterranean, as I did not want to go home and have to again leave for the Pacific war, as my parents had already had to accept the loss of my brother when he was killed in a Blenheim crash in Kenya in 1941. I was well aware of the quality of air-sea rescue in the Med and the dearth of it in the Pacific area.

Eventually, to get the ship home, we had to wait and get to Kasfareet in Egypt, near the Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal. There I had both impacted wisdom teeth removed and I sailed in October in the "Strathmore" to Melbourne, getting home (with the aid of a precious bottle of Scotch whisky to sooth me as I recovered bits of bone from the cavity) in November for discharge in November 1945, after 4 years and 11 months service, including 4 years 7 months overseas.

Years after the war was finished (and I suppose mostly forgotten), I recall seeing a Television film about "Australians at War" and Prime Minister John Gorton very aptly and clearly described his feelings when flying the Spitfire. He said, "Flying a Spitfire was like having an extension of all your senses/faculties/intentions and being able to do whatever you wanted to. It was a marvellous feeling."

In November 2008, four of us flew in from Adelaide to Temora in NSW for a Spitfire flypast, where Guy Bourke, a Qantas pilot flew the Mark V111 and Mark XV1. He was enjoying watching me **feel** the old Spitty again, after 63 years. I add my own assessment and I say it was the second most wonderful feeling one could ever want to have, bearing in mind that I have not flown a Mosquito aircraft.

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The photo is of Lyne taking the opportunity of sitting in the cockpit again.

With thanks to Lyne Skinner, Phil Listemann, Bruce Read and Steve McGregor

The Spitfire Association

(Links to images referred to above are lost)