

### **Not Left Behind**

At the end of World War II, **Dakota flight A65-61** left Morotai with 29 Defence personnel on board. It crashed en route to Townsville. Cpl Simone Liebelt reports on the interment ceremony in PNG.

A young soldier who hitched a ride on an ill-fated RAAF flight 60 years ago has finally been laid to rest.

**Lt Alun Jones** was buried with full military honours at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Bomana on August 10, in a special funeral service for the victims of **Dakota flight 65-61**. It was the first time the World War II digger had been officially recognised as a victim of the RAAF's worst air disaster, which killed 29 passengers and crew — including 19 Army personnel — on September 18, 1945.

**Lt Jones'** niece Judith Arkell was among more than 50 relatives flown by Hercules to attend the moving service at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. Judith wasn't even born when her uncle vanished. It was only weeks after the war had ended and the young officer was trying to get home to his wife and one-year-old son in Brisbane. He was last seen boarding the Dakota, call sign—Charlie Uniform Tango, at Morotai, near Borneo.

According to Judith, "He was supposed to be coming home by ship, but his brother-in-law, **Warrant Officer Eric Wilkinson**, was a crewmember on the plane and was able to get him a seat at the last minute".

The medical evacuation flight was bringing home 17 wounded soldiers from the recent war zone when it disappeared on the way to Townsville. There was no trace of the aircraft for 25 years, until its wreckage was spotted on the side of a 14,100ft mountain in the Carstensz Ranges of Indonesian Papua.

The first recovery attempt in 1970 led to a military service at Bomana War Cemetery honouring all the victims, except for **Lt Jones**. Following a further attempt in 1999 to recover remains from the inhospitable crash site, the difficult task was completed in June this year by a team from the RAAF and Indonesian Air Force. They found a significant quantity of remains and other personal effects including identification tags (dog tags), watches and glasses. **Lt Jones'** remains and dog tags were amongst them.

At the service on August 10, he finally received a full military funeral in front of his new headstone, which now sits alongside the other victims. Also buried at the service were eight Army and three Air Force victims who had been positively identified and a communal coffin containing remains of the other victims.

Before her uncle's burial, Judith placed photos of him and his wife Jean onto his flag-draped coffin, as well as stones from his gravesite in Brisbane.

"It's very emotional for me to see his coffin here and know that his remains are actually in there after all this time," she said. "Although Alun was on the plane, he wasn't on the manifest so he was never officially recognised as being on. "It's only after his dog tags were found and returned to my Aunt Jean recently that we could get some closure.

During the ceremony, the Army, RAAF and Indonesian Defence Force provided honour guards and members of Australia's Federation Guard fired volleys over the graves. There was a fly-past by a RAAF Hercules and a lone bugler played the Last Post.

Also present were members of 2 1 Const Sqn, who were in Port Moresby working with the PNG Defence Force and serving members who were escorting veterans for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Milne Bay.

Addressing the crowd on behalf of CA Gen Peter Leahy, Brig Brian Dawson said the Victory in the Pacific was achieved in part by those on board that fateful flight.

"Of the 29 on board, 19 were members of the Australian Army, most of who were suffering wounds and medical conditions, and were being returned to Australia for better medical care," Brig Dawson said. "Many of these men had been wounded in the final battles of World War II fought in Borneo and other places in the Pacific. Their lives were to be tragically cut short in their flight to safety and to home."

After the service, Wg-Commander Rowley. Tompsett—who was in charge of the recovery effort—presented an Australian flag and slouch hat to a family representative of each Army victim. He had also previously handed out dog tags and other recovered possessions to family members.

"I don't think there could have been a better ending to the Charlie Uniform Tango tragedy," Wg-Commander Tompsett. "We had brothers and sisters, sons and daughters and nieces and nephews present and it's pretty humbling to realise how much it meant to these folk, even 60 years after the event.

"I didn't expect the raw emotion, particularly when I handed out the ID tags. It was very touching, and I've got to say, one of the most significant things I've done in my 20 years' service."

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**Army Fatality List**

Pte Keith John Bowden  
Pte Laurie Anthony Coombe  
Tpr George Phillip Duffy  
Gnr Trevor John Eiszele  
Pte Mervyn John Ford  
Sgt Arthur John Hyde  
Tpr Frederick Joseph Ireland  
Lt Alun Morris Jones  
Pte Arthur Trevor Jorgensen  
Spr James Frances Macdougall  
Pte Ian Scott McDowall  
Pte John McAlorum  
Tpr Ronald Leslie Mathiesen  
Spr John Matthews  
Pte Leonard Thomas Oakley  
Pte Ian Thomas Ray  
Pte Donald William Smith  
Pte James Ivan Tindall  
Cpl George John Welch

End