

OBITUARY

F/SGT. CLIFFORD NEWBY TONGE

The military authorities recently sent Mrs. Neilson, of Sans Souci, and formerly of Taree, the sad communication: "Deeply regret to inform you that your son, Flight-Sergeant Clifford Newby Tonge is missing, but believed to have lost his life during morning of 16th March, 1945, as a result of air operations. Known details are, he was a member of a crew of a Beaufort aircraft detailed to bomb and strafe enemy concentration, which exploded and crashed whilst over target area, south of Kauk plantation, near But, New Guinea. The Minister for Air joins Air Board in expressing sincere sympathy in your anxiety."

So a young Manning River boy met his tragic death at Aitape, Wewak, New Guinea. Born in Taree 26 years ago, he became well known in this district, later went to Sydney, joined the Railway staff at Strathfield. Then enlisted in the Air Force as did his brothers, Norman and Ainslie—passed his examinations with credit in a remarkably short time, and became a Flight-Sergeant. He had been on active service for some time, and had just returned to New Guinea after spending holidays at home, when his death took place.

F/Sgt. Scherer, D.M., says: "Cliff and I were coppers—a fact which gave me great pleasure, it is a loss of such a fine friend. His end was sudden. I doubt if he knew anything of it. It seems his aircraft was blown up while he was bombing the target. He and his crew mate, Gordon Pentfield, frequently played cards with us in their leisure time. It was felt and freely acknowledged by all of us that they were the most popular members of our team. When we heard that they had gone, our first reaction was—"I wish it had been some other crew." Their loss is a blow, not only to us, but to every member of the squadron. Although no remains of the crew were found, a service was held for the boys the following Sunday. Padre Pickburn prayed for their souls and spoke most eloquently of them. Among the hymns were, "Nearer My God to Thee," and "Lead Kindly Light." The service was short but very impressive. He also spoke highly of Cliff's popularity and emphasized his loss, not only to his people, but also to the squadron as a whole. In concluding the service the Padre read feelingly, "Riding Forth," by W. C. Braithwaite:—

Out of the city's shadow into day
Ride forth our brightest, best, and are
gone;
The busy streets with crowded life
flow on:

The busy streets with crowded life
flow on;
But they have passed the walls and
all is grey.

They pass into the silence, and are
blest;
Our fretful life a few years they trod,
And joyfully we give them back to
God—
Our heroes furnished for some higher
quest.

They ride upon His errands, we re-
main,
Yet still their presence nerves our
service here,
While to their sight our city shineth
clear;
And of our human love their souls
are vain.

Out of the city's shadow they are gone,
Out of life's dimness into God's own
day;
Within we weep, then front the day
and pray,
And, strengthened, to the unfinished
work pass on.

A splendid floral tribute, in the form
of Wings was placed in a prominent
position on the Cenotaph, Martin Place,
Sydney, on Anzac Day by Mrs. Nielsen
(mother of Cliff) and Mrs. Day (mother
of Phil Day) in honor of the lost crew.