

'Yarns & Photos – Beautiful Old Berowra from Hornsby to the Hawkesbury'. The book contains a timeline of the suburb and listed among the local men who fell during the war is 'Jack Hirst'. The book was compiled from interviews and contributions from long term Berowra residents during the 1980s. **It appears that someone at the time knew Jack Hirst's story.**

The author is also aware that post-war an ex-soldier by the name of **Gerald Hirst** resided in Berowra, raising a family. NX52580 Gerard Burnside Hirst had served with 2/19th Battalion AIF during the war and had been taken prisoner by the Japanese during the *Fall of Singapore* and spent the rest of the war in captivity. He was resident at *Turner Road Berowra Heights* in the 1960s and later at *Nalya Road, Berowra Heights* until 1992. I am not aware of any family connection between Gerard Hirst and Jack Hirst and would welcome any further information.

A sad twist to the tale: Returning to the pilot of the Kittyhawk, 423858 **Flight Sergeant John Edward O'Connell**, known as Ted. The Coronial Inquest found no case of negligence against O'Connell and he continued flying with 78 Squadron, serving in New Guinea from November 1943 to July 1944. The squadron acquitted itself well, gradually moving in a north west direction initially along

the northern New Guinea coastline to the landing at Tarakan Island in Borneo in July 1944.

The squadron's most famous action occurring on 3rd June 1944 when fifteen of its Kittyhawk's clashed with *Japanese Oscar fighters* and *Kate dive bombers* near *Biak Island*. Heavily outnumbered, the squadron shot down seven Oscar fighters, three Kate dive bombers and damaged another Oscar fighter. The squadron lost one Kittyhawk and its pilot in what turned out to be the largest number of enemy aircraft destroyed by a RAAF squadron during a single combat in the Pacific. The clash was known in the squadron as the 'Big-Do' and a photograph was taken of the pilots shortly after they landed.

The photograph exists within the Australian War Memorials collection and Flight Sergeant Ted O'Connell is among the men as well as 418828 **Flight Sergeant John Geoffrey Norman Gadsden**. I mention Gadsden as after completing his tour Flight Sergeant Ted O'Connell was posted to Mildura as a Flying Instructor with 2 OTU (Operational Training Unit). The 25th October 1944 found Flight Sergeant John Gadsden also at Mildura on a refresher course after six weeks tropical leave. In what was to be Ted O'Connell's last flight at Mildura he sat behind his old friend from 78 Squadron in a CAC *Wirraway* training aircraft.

During the flight the aircraft was put through aerobatics and was seen to go into a spin and then struck the ground.

Both pilots were killed instantly. There is some irony that two men who had recently successfully taken the fight to the Japanese should also lose their lives in a simple training accident. *They lie at rest at Mildura War Cemetery*. Both men were only twenty years of age when they died. **BT**

Lest we forget.

Additional sources: <https://rslmuseummildura.com.au/history/tragedy-at-2otu/> | <https://78squadron.com>

Written & researched by Scott Wilson (09/25). *I'm not sure if Bush Tele readers are aware, but the Sub-Branch has finished some alterations to the rear WW2 panel on the Berowra memorial. We have added the name of Roy Warwick Salmon and added a cross to Robert Frederick Young's name to indicate that he was killed in action. Both men's stories you published in the BT for us a few years ago. I will be talking for a few minutes about them on Remembrance Day. SW.*



L-R Hornsby Shire Mayor Warren Waddell, Alister Henskens SC MP Member for Wahroonga, James Wallace Member for Hornsby and Julian Leeser MP Member for Berowra, Remembrance Day Hornsby Cenotaph 2025.

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2025

At 11am on 11 November, our community will pause together to mark Remembrance Day.

From the Hornsby Cenotaph to the memorials in Berowra, Epping and Cherrybrook, people across our electorate will gather to lay wreaths, hear the Last Post, and observe a minute's silence in honour of those who served and those who never returned home.

Across our RSL sub-branches, schools, Scouts and Guides, veterans, families and neighbours will stand side by side - young and old - to reflect on the sacrifice that secured the freedoms we have today.

As we remember those who served before us, let us also recognise the many veterans who continue to serve our nation and community every day - as coaches, mentors and volunteers who make Berowra the strong and connected place we are proud to call home.

I encourage everyone to attend one of our local Remembrance Day service's and take a moment to reflect on the courage, duty and sacrifice of all who have worn our nation's uniform.

Lest we forget.

Julian Leeser MP | Federal Member for Berowra | Shadow Minister for Education and Early Learning | Shadow Minister for the Arts. **BT**

78 Squadron pilots photographed immediately after the 'Big-Do'.

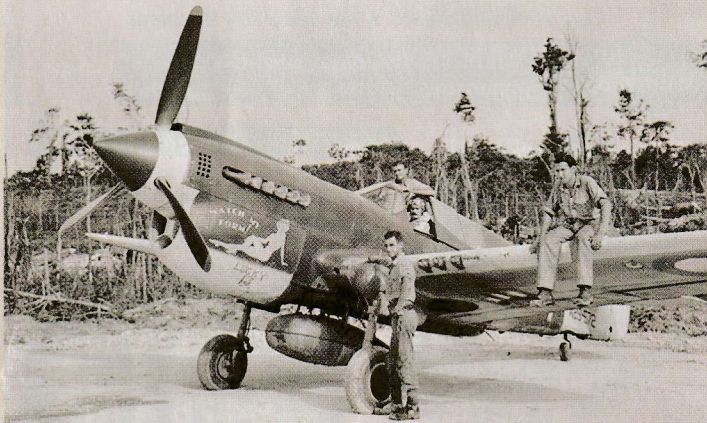


Photo courtesy of the Australian War Memorial

All Souls' Day

At Palmdale we are commemorating all of the faithful departed during our All Souls' Day service.

We pray for all our dearly departed loved ones at this time of remembrance. Join us for the commemoration of all the faithful departed.

ALL SOULS MASS

WHEN Sunday 6th November 2025 Commencing at 10:00am

WHERE Hillside Chapel, Palmdale Lawn Cemetery and Memorial Garden, Palmdale Road, Palmdale



CREIGHTONS
FUNERAL SERVICE

PALMDALE
LAWN CEMETERY & MEMORIAL PARK