

Private Colin Lloyd Murn

World War Two

20/01/1919 – 6/11/1964



Submission for the 2025 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize

– By STU032

Life before the war

SX11214 Colin Loyd Murn was born on the 20th of January, 1919¹ to parents Joan Murn, and Cecil Pennant Murn (Figure 1).² Cecil, his next of kin during the war, was a journalist, editor and lessee of the *Port Pirie Recorder*, the local Pirie newspaper.³ Alongside five other siblings, Colin grew up in the town of his father's newspaper, Port Pirie, South Australia, specifically in 'Solomontown'.⁴ It was likely here where he learnt to swim, and he was a competitor in many swimming events in town,⁵ coming fourth in the Swim Through Pirie, an annual local swimming competition along the Pirie River, in 1940 after he was tipped by locals in the newspaper as a strong contender.⁶



Figure 1: Cecil Murn about to try a Cornish pasty, courtesy of private collection of family member Glen Bernhardt private collection.



Figure 2: Photograph of Port Pirie High School, courtesy of Port Pirie High Facebook Page.

Colin was also a district cricket player and participated in the Butler's Bridge country dances, where, as a young man with blue eyes and curly blond hair he was given the nickname 'Curly Murn'.⁷ It was at one of these dances that he met a woman named Joan Taylor, who was to one day become his wife.⁸ He attended Port Pirie High School, like most other kids in town (Figure 2).

¹ Australian Rats (L-Z), Rats of Tobruk Association, n.d., *Rats of Tobruk Association*.

² Ancestry.com.au, *Cecil Pennant Murn* – Ancestry, 2021.

³ Government of South Australia, *LibGuides: Journalists in South Australia: A to Z list of journalists*, 2017.

⁴ *The Adelaide Chronicle*, Births, Deaths, and Marriages, 10 February 1944, p.10.

⁵ Last, P. *The Repat: A Biography of Repatriation General Hospital (Daw Park) and a History of Repatriation Services in South Australia*, 1994, p.122.

⁶ *The Recorder*, "Seventeenth 'Swim Through Pirie' This Afternoon," 16 March 1940.

⁷ Interview with Alan Murn, 8 June 2025.

⁸ Last, P. *The Repat: A Biography of Repatriation General Hospital (Daw Park) and a History of Repatriation Services in South Australia*, 1994, p.122.

During the war

Nearly a year after World War Two broke out, Colin Lloyd Murn signed up to fight as a fit and healthy young man on the 6th of September 1940.⁹ However, he was set back by an illness, so did not sign the oath of enlistment until the 4th of February 1941,¹⁰ where he was enlisted in the 2/43rd Battalion. At the time he was 21, a man of the Methodist church, single and with no children, as written on his Attestation Form.

He embarked on His Majesty's Transport Ship *Queen Mary* in Sydney, headed for the Middle East (Figure 3),¹¹ on the 10th of April 1941, the same day that the Siege of Tobruk began.¹²

Murn travelled to Maghazi Camp (Figure 4)¹⁰ in what is now the Gaza Strip, where he first joined up with the 9th Australian Infantry Specialist Group on the 18th of May,¹⁰ which was part of the AIF training set up supporting reinforcements bound for Tobruk.¹³ It was here where Murn would have undertaken intensive specialized training with other Australian soldiers (Figure 5).

Murn joined up with the 2/43rd Battalion on the 21st of July, when Colonel Wideyer received orders for the battalion to form an inner defence line at Tobruk.¹⁴ On the 30th of July the battalion moved back to a salient, relieving the 2/32nd Battalion,¹⁵ and although Murn kept no personal diary at the time and was extremely reluctant to discuss the circumstances of his days at war,⁷ John G. Glenn, a soldier who was a part of the battalion at the same time, recorded that:

“The days were hot, with a wind like the breath of a furnace, and the nights were bathed in the light of a full moon, curtailing the movements of the Salient men and presenting ration parties with the difficult task of getting a meal up, with the gaps in the minefields covered by the enemy fixed lines of fire.”¹

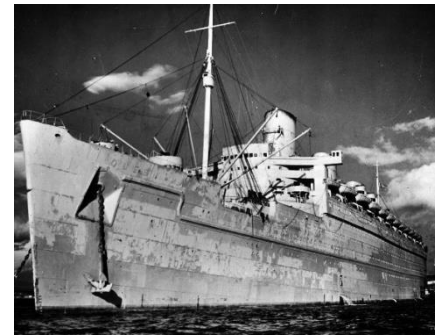


Figure 3: Photo of RMS Queen Mary, ship that Colin Murn took from Sydney to Middle East.



Figure 4: Maghazi Training Camp ariel view photograph WW2 set up.

9 National Archives of Australia, *Attestation Form [service record]*, n.d.

10 National Archives of Australia, *Service and Casualty Form [service record]*, n.d.

11 Warfare History Network, *RMS Queen Mary's War Service: Voyages to Victory*, 2020.

12 Australian War Memorial, *Tobruk Diaries Timeline*, 2020.

13 Wikipedia contributors, *9th Division (Australia)*, 2019.

14 Virtual War Memorial Australia, *William Frederick (Bill) Luck*, 2025.

15 Australian War Memorial, *2/101 General Transport Company*, 2025.

On the 2nd and 3rd of August Murn was wounded and Mentioned in Dispatches for his part in a disastrous attack where the 2/43rd launched a four-platoon attack, and met strong fire that left only 33 men unscathed from the 137 men they began with. General Morshead could only declare so many people during the Siege of Tobruk, which meant that Murn was one of only 50 dispatches at the time ¹⁶, showing his extreme heroism and bravery.

Murn and his men persisted, with shell fire consistent on the front line, and a sandstorm in which the men lay in their holes, gasping for breath and choking on dust.¹⁷



Figure 5: A photograph of a group of Australian soldiers in Palestine 'All the boys in the tent'. Colin Murn featured top right.

On the 22nd of October 1941, after having endured constant fire in an ever-encircled battleground, Murn and his men were relieved from their holes.¹⁸ An extract from John G. Glenn writes,

“We packed up and were transported to the harbor where we silently walked along the water’s edge, over stones and shell holes, with eyes and ears alert to detect the sounds of hostile planes and destroyers, on the journey with us a dog called ‘Toby the Wog dog’, that many of the men had become extremely attached to.”¹⁶

16 Maughan, B. *Tobruk and El Alamein*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1966.

17 Glenn, J.G. *Tobruk to Tarakan*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1960, p.76.

18 Shrine of Remembrance, *The Rats of Tobruk: An Enduring Australian & Polish Friendship*, 2021.

They were transported by ship to Alexandria, then to Juis, and to Tripoli.¹⁹ He then moved to El Alamein in Egypt where, against the Germans and Italians, they held the northern sector for nearly four months.²⁰ During this time Murn drove trucks which was a demanding and dangerous job, as he would have delivered vital supplies while faced with threats from ambushes, landmines, sniper fire and harsh weather conditions.²¹

These dangers became a reality on the 27th of July 1942 at about 3am during the Libyan campaign, when Murn was taking ammunition forward and came under fire from South African artillery which had been misdirected.²² Murn said that he was ordered by the officer with him to take shelter in a shell-hole, where his right leg was completely blown off, and the other was severely mutilated.²³ According to his wife, Joan Murn, he was not expected to survive at this time, spending many hours on a train journey with nobody attending to him but a young Arab boy who spoke no English.²³ In hospital in Cairo, the family recalls a now lost photo of Murn covered in a sheet, he was expected to die and was left out in the sunshine.⁷ This moment is a clear example of Murn's perseverance, he refused to let go, and his survival was not just a stroke of luck but a testament to his strength of will and undying courage.



Figure 6: Medals that were awarded to Colin Murn for his service during WW2, courtesy of son, Alan Murn.

19 Australian War Memorial, *2/43rd Australian Infantry Battalion*, n.d.

20 Virtual War Memorial Australia, *24th Infantry Battalion*, 2021.

21 Australian War Memorial, *2/43rd Unit Diary*, n.d.

22 Last, P. *The Repat: A Biography of Repatriation General Hospital (Daw Park) and a History of Repatriation Services in South Australia*, 1994, p.123.

23 Interview with Colin Murn, 1943.

Due to this courage and will, Murn embarked back home to Australia on the 12th of September 1942, disembarking in Melbourne, and was admitted to Heidelberg Hospital.²⁴ He was recognised with the Africa Star medal, the 1939–1945 Star, the Defence Medal, the Australia Service Medal, and the War Medal 1939–1945 (Figure 6).²⁵

After the War



Figure 7: Photograph of Harrold Lobb (left), Jean Blacker (middle), and Colin Murn (right), at Seacliff in December 1942.

In 1942, once back in Australia, Murn was moved to the Repatriation General Hospital in Daw Park, Adelaide. There was a nurse that worked in the Repat, a champion swimmer named Jean Blacker who, while in charge of Ward 3, took Murn and other amputees to the beach in Seacliff in their wheelchairs (Figure 7).²⁶ While there she took them swimming, giving Murn back the ability to enjoy an activity that had been beloved by him in his pre-war days. Even with the loss of his legs, Colin showed courage in returning to the water, to continue with the sport that had been a big part of his youth in Port Pirie.

In the hospital he resolved to follow his father into working on the newspaper, learning to be a linotype operator.⁸ In July 1943, he met up again with the young woman Joan Taylor from the country dances.⁷ They were married in March 1944.²⁷ Colin and Joan went on to have five children (Figure 8), one dying at 18 months from biliary atresia.⁸



Figure 8: Photograph of Colin Murn and family, including youngest, Jillian, who passed away at 18 months.

24 National Archives of Australia, *Service and Casualty Form [service record]*, n.d., p.8.

25 Anzac Day Organisation, *The Anzac Day Tradition*, n.d.

26 Interview with Jean Blacker, 17 January 1992.

27 *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), Family Notices, 3 February 1944.

In the years after the war, he became a keen pigeon racer, with his son Alan remembering how he and his father would sit in their yard as the pigeons returned (Figure 9).⁷ Because linotyping exposed workers to lead poisoning and asbestos,²⁸ and Murn's health was already compromised, he became photographer for *The Recorder*, making him an even more well-known figure in the community, appearing at events such as the school sports days.²⁹ Although he attempted to live as a normal bloke living a normal life, his knees would become very sore, and after having a bath his children would massage his legs to get the circulation going again, being willing helpers for the dad they loved so dearly.⁷



Figure 9: Photograph of Murn's pigeon from pigeon racing days, courtesy of son, Alan Murn.

Near the end of his life, Murn suffered heart attacks from the pressure on his heart due to surgeries on his legs, before dying suddenly of myocardial infarction while painting a wall with his son, Alan Murn, on November 6th, 1964, aged 45.³⁰ Colin's death meant his father, Cecil, had to write a third son's death notice in *The Recorder* (Figure 10). He is buried in the military gravesite in Port Pirie (Figure 11).

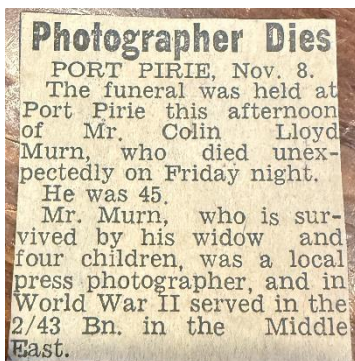


Figure 10: Newspaper clipping from 'The Recorder' announcing Colin Murn's death, kept by son, Alan Murn.



Figure 11: Photograph of Murn's gravestone detailing his army number, unit, birthday, family members.

28 Rare Cache Broadcast, *Linotype and Lead Poisoning*, 2015.

29 Interview with Jill Wallbridge, 7 June 2025.

30 Find a Grave, *Cecil Pennant Murn Memorial*, 2019.

ANZAC Characteristics

Colin Murn showed perseverance and courage in every stage of his life. On the battlefield, and especially in Tobruk, he endured relentless shellfire and harsh conditions, persisting even when rations were scarce and the enemy's fire never let up. His bravery under pressure was recognised when he was Mentioned in Dispatches, a rare honour that marked him out as someone who stood and continued on when so many around him had fallen.

That same courage carried him through the loss of both his legs in Libya. Most would have given in to pain and despair, yet Colin refused. Even when he was expected not to survive, he found the strength to keep going.

His perseverance didn't end with recovery, because he returned to Port Pirie, swam once again, created a family, and found new ways to contribute to his community by working for the newspaper. Though he lived with constant pain, he showed courage in the way he kept moving forward.

Colin Murn's story is a clear reflection of the ANZAC spirit, courage in the face of danger, and perseverance in rebuilding a life forever changed by war.

This word count does not include referencing, bibliography, and brief captions under photographs/tables/maps etc as per guidelines: 1498 words

HASS word count: 1498

Gathering the Evidence

In my history class, the opportunity to complete this assignment was offered to some of the students who were high achievers and enjoyed history lessons. I knew I wanted to research someone in my family tree, but I didn't know of anyone who had served in World War 2. I spoke to my grandmother who informed me that her brother-in-law's father had been a soldier and had both his legs blow off in El Alamein. This instantly intrigued me, and my grandmother was able to tell me a few facts about him already, as she also grew up in Port Pirie, and remembered him as being the town photographer.

I began by talking to the son of Colin Murn, Alan, and gathering as much anecdotal information as I could. We talked through the kind of father Colin was, his struggles while adapting and living as a man with no legs, and how he died when Alan was only 14, and the impact that it left. Alan brought out newspaper clippings mentioning Colin's death from the Recorder, as well as other personal items related to his father, such as a photo of the pigeon they raced in the races.

Alan had two books, one being 'Tobruk to Tarakan', which, being a Rat of Tobruk, Colin had acquired. The other was a biography of the Repatriation Hospital in Daw Park, Adelaide, which a small story on Colin Murn, detailing his life and character after the war.

I read these books and this all gave me a foundation for Colins story but raised many questions surrounding Colin's movements and the Tobruk Siege itself.

I created a timeline of Colins movements by downloading his Service and Casualty forms from the National Archives of Australia, and I cross checked it against a timeline of the 2/43rd battalion which the VWMA written timeline assisted me in.

In addition to the photos that Alan lent to me, and the ones I found online, I gathered family members photos through Facebook, as well as a photo of a group of Australian soldiers in Palestine featuring Colin, that I found through the State Library.

I read the Unit Diaries, as well as Tobruk to Tarakan, and made many online searches, which helped me develop an appreciation for the perseverance Colin and the Rats of Tobruk demonstrated, through varied climates and environments, as well as different battles and postings they were involved in.

I spent time with two history teachers, asking feedback and being guided through how to properly reference a source, which was incredibly beneficial, not just for this assignment, but for others I will complete in the future.

I also found Trove to be phenomenally helpful in gathering articles from 'The Recorder', providing details on his love for swimming, the main events in his siblings and parents life, as well as the families grief after Colins death. Through all these sources, I provided a balance of diaries, online searches, photographs, information from books, and interviews that created a colourful story that highlighted bravery, persistence, love, time, grief and fun.

HASS word count: 511

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Image References

Figure 1: Cecil Murn about to try a Cornish pasty, courtesy of private collection of family member Glen Bernhardt private collection.

Bernhardt, Glen . *Cecil Pennant Murn about to Try a Cornish Pasty* , 2025.

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Figure 2: Photograph of Port Pirie High School, courtesy of Port Pirie High Facebook Page.

Port Pirie High School. "Port Pirie High Photograph ," *Port Pirie High Facebook Page* , www.facebook.com/groups/19028138444/.

Figure 3: Photo of RMS Queen Mary, ship that Colin Murn took from Sydney to Middle.

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Figure 4: Maghazi Training Camp ariel view photograph WW2 set up.

"PALESTINE. 1942-03-10. MUGHAZI CAMP, ONE of the TRAINING CAMPS of the A.I.F. REINFORCEMENT DEPOT ..." *Awm.gov.au*, 10 Mar. 1942, www.awm.gov.au/collection/C13585.

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State Library of South Australia. *A Group of Australian Soldiers in Palestine* , 1941.

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Blacker , Jean. "Harrold Lobb, Jean Blacker, and Colin Murn at Seacliff," *A Biography of Repatriation General Hospital (Daw Park) and a History of Repatriation Services in South Australia*, 1942.

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