

GILBERT ERNEST STONEHAM – 141208

19/1/1925 – 8/4/2017



Figure 1- Gilbert Stoneham at 91-years-old in Uniform and Medals (2016) [photograph], Australian War Memorial, accessed 2 August 2025.

Premiers ANZAC School Spirit Prize

SCH006

STU007

PART A



Figure 2- Photograph of Gil and his siblings at Gil's niece's wedding. Photographed in 1986 by family. Photograph supplied by Melva Matulin during her interview.



Figure 3 – Photograph of Gil wearing his service uniform before departure for war. Photographed in 1943, photograph provided by Grant Stoneham during an interview.

Gilbert “Gil” Stoneham was born on 19 January 1925 in Yorketown as the eldest of 5 siblings (Figure 2). The family moved to Renmark when Gil was ten so his father could find work as a Stonemason during the Great Depression, and so the family could take care of their grandfather, who was unwell. Gil was “*the loveliest brother*”,² and always helped his family. Whenever Gil was granted leave from the war, he would take the train home to Renmark, and his younger sister, Melva would run down and meet him at the station.²

Gil finished his schooling at Renmark Primary School at fourteen to work as an apprentice carpenter. He was determined to join the army and honour his country, however his father insisted he was too young, which delayed his enlistment. At the age of eighteen in 1943, Gil voluntarily enlisted to join the war effort on the 13th of September in Adelaide with the RAAF¹ (Figures 3,11 & 12).

Because of Gil’s smaller size, he served as a “biscuit bomber” with a rank of leading aircraftman.¹ Biscuit bombers were one of the most important positions involved in air support and dispatch. Smaller people like Gil were hired for the risky job, because it involved them hanging out of planes under occasional enemy fire to push crates of support materials with accuracy onto the ground below. The planes had to fly at dangerously low heights of 45-60 metres, and then men hung out the planes with no hearing protection to push the crates. Most men who served as biscuit bombers lost their hearing early in their post-war life due to the loud noise exposure, Gil included. There were also no safety harnesses, meaning many men fell out of the plane and died. This position was primarily used for troops in Papua New Guinea, a country notorious for their heavy storms and cyclones.³ Gil served in this dangerous position

and displayed courage and bravery, as he was prepared to face dangers to support the Allied troops.

The biscuit bombers delivered supplies and humanitarian aid in hard-to-access areas, like dense jungles in Papua New Guinea. Similar methods of delivering this support are still used today in the armed forces, but it does not involve as many people, and in safer conditions. Now modern technology and electronic guidance equipment are more accurate in pinpointing the drop sites and safely releasing the resources.³

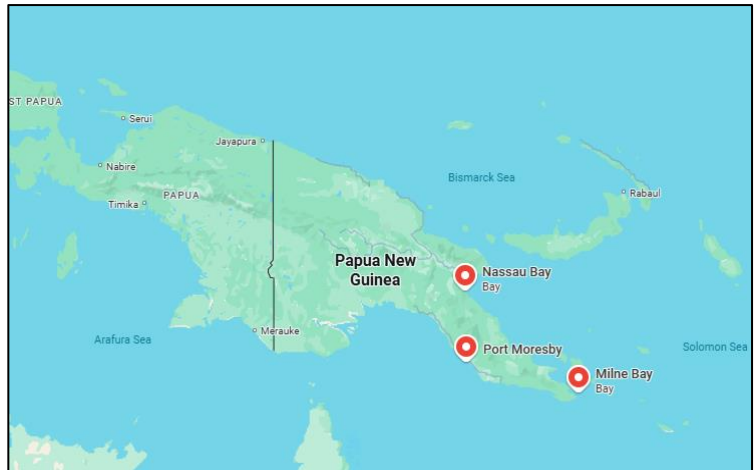


Figure 4– Map of Gil's Service Locations. Image screenshot off of desktop from Google Maps by Grace Wegner on 30/7/2025.

The RAAF was in critical need of more men, so just four days after his enlistment, Gil was sent to 1RD (Recruit Drill) in Shepparton. He left from Recruiting Centre 5 to the first recruit drill, where he learnt about his risky role. The recruit drills lasted 5 days, running from 13th to the 18th of October.⁸ On that same day, Gil was posted to 1 Stores Depot (1SD) in the B Squad. The stores depots were in charge of managing and organising the materials, ready to be shipped and dropped to Australian troops. A few weeks after his positioning here, Gil took some leave and was granted a promotion to Leading AirCraftman.⁸ Gil was called back from leave to be stationed in the stores depot in Port Melbourne. In the following days, Gil was posted to 4PD, the personnel depot where Gil would end up disembarking from Australia with other servicemen to fulfill his role as a biscuit bomber. He and his mates embarked from Australia to Papua New Guinea on the 30th of May 1944 on their first tour as the Number 7 Transport Movement Office (7TMO). From June of 1944, Gil spent sixteen months of his service working between Reserve Personnel Pools and Depots, always shipped off with the same mates from 7TMO⁹ (see Figure 10). The men stayed and served together in their troop, giving Gil a good sense of mateship, and what it meant to work together in a team during a time of struggles. They spent their time serving in locations like Port Moresby, Nassau Bay and spent a primary focus on Milne Bay (see Figure 4). The men served mainly in coastal areas, and Milne Bay was a large area for the army, which had been fought for, won and held confidently by the Allied Forces since 1942.⁶ According to Gil's unit diary⁹, a total of 627,550 pounds of supplies like medicines, food and artillery had been dropped in locations around Papua New Guinea's bays. 120,376 pounds alone had been dropped to Milne Bay, highlighting how crucial this station was to Australian defence.⁹



Figure 5 – Photograph of Gil and Gladys on their wedding day. Photographed in 1946. Photo supplied by Grant Stoneham during an interview.

For two weeks, Gil had been deployed with the 7TMO to Tadj with the RAAF.⁸ The group left on the 19th of September, only six months after Australia had taken that military station from the



Figure 6 – Photograph of Gil's medals earned in service. Artefact photographed by Grace Wegner on 13/7/2025



Figure 7 – Photograph of Gil and Gladys. Photographed on an unknown date. Photograph provided by Grant Stoneham during an interview.



Figure 8 – Photograph of Gil and Gladys' headstone at the Renmark cemetery. Photographed by Zachary Matulin (relative) on the 3/8/2025

volunteer to support the Renmark North Cricket Club. With help and inspiration from his friend, David Ruston, Gil and Gladys found a passion for growing roses and stocks and opened "Stoneham's Florist" in Renmark. The shop was closed down in the early 2000's when the pair were ready to retire, but their love of growing continued and they grew vegetables on their property. No matter the season, there was always something planted. Yet again, Gil demonstrated mateship, as he was always willing to give away his produce to family and friends; many loved his kindness and humour.

Japanese. The area was likely still hostile and would have involved lots of necessities from dispatch to set up the base for Australian Defence.¹⁰

Gilbert returned to Australia in late 1945 and was stationed in Gawler before his official discharge. Here, Gil amusingly met his future wife, Gladys, when accidentally dropping his cigarette into her hair from an overhead balcony. The couple quickly connected and got married in 1946. (Figure 5)

Gil was officially discharged from service on the 6th of March 1946 (Figure 14), and he came back home to Renmark with Gladys. Together, they built their home that they lived in until their passing. They had four children (three girls and a boy) and numerous grandchildren and greatgrandchildren.

For Gil's courageous service in the war efforts, he was awarded four medals, including the 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star, War Medal and Australian Service Medal 1939-45 (Figure 6).⁷ All were awarded for his courageous contributions in service to the RAAF, especially in Papua New Guinea, which is what his Pacific Star Medal was awarded for.

Gil returned from the war to begin working at his brother Walter's building company as a tiler until his mid-fifties. Additionally, Gil became a member of the Returned Services League (RSL) and was granted a life membership. Gil could be found at the dawn service every ANZAC Day and he joined the ANZAC Day marches in Renmark annually until his passing, wearing his medals with pride. Later, his grandson Travis and great-grandson Tate, would walk in the march wearing the medals in honour of Gil.

Before his hearing loss, Gil learned how to play the violin. He performed in the town band at local town events like Saturday night dances, musicals, and on Sundays at the Lutheran church with his friend, Hugh. Gil always found time to have a game of cricket and

volunteer to support the Renmark North Cricket Club. With help and inspiration from his friend, David Ruston, Gil and Gladys found a passion for growing roses and stocks and opened "Stoneham's Florist" in Renmark. The shop was closed down in the early 2000's when the pair were ready to retire, but their love of growing continued and they grew vegetables on their property. No matter the season, there was always something planted. Yet again, Gil demonstrated mateship, as he was always willing to give away his produce to family and friends; many loved his kindness and humour.

In March of 2015, Gladys passed away. Losing Gladys made Gil lonely and caused him to die of heartbreak two years later, on the 8th of April 2017. He passed away aged 92 in respite and was buried in Renmark cemetery next to Gladys (Figure 8). As a beloved member of the community, the town banded together for his funeral. Hundreds of family members, close friends and acquaintances joined together to celebrate the loving, courageous legacy of one of Renmark’s proud service members.

Throughout his entire life, Gil showed the ANZAC Spirit characteristics of mateship and courage. Both in his squad and community, Gil was a “mate” to everyone. Gil would always stop whatever he was doing to talk. Whenever Gil worked outside, he always stopped and pulled the tractor over for a chat.⁴ The running joke in the family was whenever they couldn’t find Gil, they figured he had found someone to talk to and would make his way home eventually!⁴ Gil could be counted on to “crack a joke,” as he was a big tease in the family. He would always claim to not have heard someone speak, unless they whispered he was deaf – in which case he definitely heard that!⁴

Gil showed courage when serving with the RAAF, and willingly risked his life to deliver aid, which helped defend Australia from Japanese invasion in Papua New Guinea. Grant said himself that; *“The New Guinea lads were the unsung heroes of World War Two. They saved Australia from Japanese invasion and deserve more credit than what they get.”*⁴ However, Gil has left his loving memory in Renmark’s community. His name has been preserved in the Renmark Institute (Figure 9) and also the Stansbury War Memorial (Figure 10), near his birthplace, Yorketown. Truly leaving a legacy for Renmark to admire and aspire to.



Figure 9 – Photograph of the Renmark District Honour Board inside the Renmark Institute. Photographed by Grace Wegner on 1/8/2025

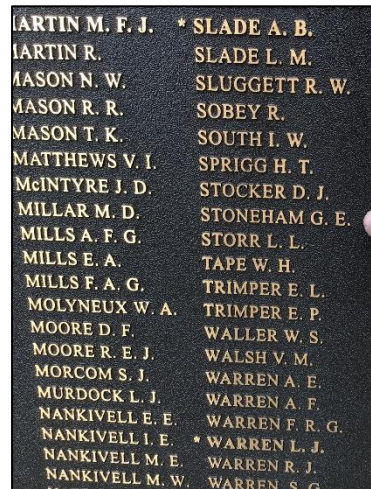


Figure 10 – Photograph of the Stansbury War Memorial, zoomed in on Gil’s name. Photographed by Ted Buttfield on 1/8/2025

UNIVERSAL SERVICE
PERSONNEL
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE.

Form P/P. 48.
(Revised April, 1942)

Application for Enlistment as an Airman (8)

PART I

1. Surname (block letters) STONEHAM, H.C.

2. Christian Names (in full) Gilbert Ernest

3. Address Remmick H.B.E. SIGHTED
[Signature]

4. Date and Place of Birth Yorkshire 19/1/1925

5. Married or Single Single

6. Are you a British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject of pure European descent? Yes

7. Nationality of Parents at their birth: Father B.P. Mother [Signature]

8. Trade in which it is desired to enlist General Hand

9. Particulars of experience (to be supported by copies of references)—

(a) at trade in which it is desired to enlist

(b) at any other occupation

10. Did you serve an apprenticeship? (Give full particulars)

YOUR PRESENT OCCUPATION carpenter

HOW LONG SO OCCUPIED 2 years

11. Your present occupation YOUR PRESENT EMPLOYER Large Remmick

12. Your present employer PREVIOUS OCCUPATION

13. Educational Qualifications (including technical education)

14. Have you submitted an application before; if so, when? No

15. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? No

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A9301, 141208

Figure 11- Page 1 of Gil's enlistment application. Paperwork sourced from: [Gilbert Ernest Stoneham's War Enlistment and Discharge Paperwork](#) (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 2 August 2025.

(THIS FORM MUST BE FILLED IN INK)

STATUTORY DECLARATION

I, GILBERT ERNEST Stoneham
(Full Christian Names) (Surname in Block Letters)

do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

(1) I embarked from Australia for 20/5/44 on 20/5/44

(2) I disembarked in Australia on 20/8/45

(3) On return to Australia, I was granted 46 days leave consisting of:

.....days Disembarkation leave

.....days Recreation leave

.....days Tropical leave

(4) Date of Birth 19/1/25

(5) Religion Cong.

(6) Enlisted at No 5 R.C. Recruit Centre on 12/8/42

And I make this solemn declaration by virtue of the Statutory Declaration Act 1911-1922, conscientiously believing the statement contained therein to be true in every particular.

Declared at NO. 4 PERSONNEL DEPOT, SPRINGBANK, S.A.
THE 21st DAY OF February 1946.

Signature Stoneham G.E.

Before me: [Signature]
(Commissioner for Declarations)

NOTE: Any person who makes an untrue statement in a statutory declaration is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment with or without hard labour for four years.

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A9301, 141208

Page 10

Figure 12 - page 2 of Gil's enlistment application. Paperwork sourced from: [Gilbert Ernest Stoneham's War Enlistment and Discharge Paperwork](#) (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 2 August 2025.

PERSONAL RECORD OF SERVICE - AIRMEN - AIRWOMEN
R.A.A.F. FORM P/T (Revised April, 1943)

1. *PERMANENT FORCE 2. *CITIZEN FORCE

5. CHRISTIAN NAMES: **Gilbert Ernest**

6. No. **141268**

7. NAME: **STONEHAM**

8. NEXT OF KIN: **Relationship: [unclear] Address: [unclear]**

9. PERSON TO BE INFORMED OF CASUALTIES: **Name: [unclear] Relationship: [unclear] Address: [unclear]**

10. NATIONALITY: **[unclear]**

11. ENLISTMENTS AND RE-ENGAGEMENTS

Enlisted at	for duration of the war	and a period of twelve months thereafter on	RE-ENGAGED for	years on	Authority
NO. 5 REC. CENTRE			18 SEP 43	18	5K6 PGR 19/43

12. PREV. NAVAL, MILITARY or AIR SERVICE

Unit	From	To	Rank on Discharge	Decorations, etc.	Authority
[Handwritten: 28/12/43]				1939-45 [unclear] [unclear]	[unclear]

13. POSTINGS

Posted To	Date	Authority	Posted To	Date	Authority
010110	17.9.43	100/104/43			
No. 5 Rec. Cent. (8 Sqd)	18.10.43	150/151/43			
A.P.D. (1-1-25)	25.4.44	100/104/43			
A.R.B.T. (WAR)	17.5.44	100/104/43			
No. 7 T.M.O. (1044)	27.7.44	7.740/44			
A.P.D.	28.2.45	100/104/43			
A.P.D.	21.2.46	400/100/46			

14. REDUCTIONS AND REVERSIONS

Date	Authority
13.5.43	PGR 19/43
13.2.44	137/2/44

15. ATTACHMENTS

Attached From To Authority

DISCHARGE

16. MOVEMENTS AND MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

Relegated on demb. 26.6.46 - 400/100

National Archives of Australia NAA: [unclear]

Figure 13 - Gil's service record. Paperwork sourced from: Gilbert Ernest Stoneham's War Enlistment and Discharge Paperwork (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 2 August 2025.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND DISCHARGE

Number: **141268** Rank: **1st Lt**

Full Name: **STONEHAM, GILBERT ERNEST**

Date of Birth: **11/11/1916** Date of Enlistment: **17/9/43** Date of Discharge: **6/2/46**

Occupation in Civil Life: **[unclear]**

Reason for Discharge under the provisions of A.F.R. 118 (T): **[unclear]**

Character on Discharge: **[unclear]**

R.A.A.F. Mustering or Trade: **[unclear]**

Degree of Trade Proficiency A: **[unclear]** B: **[unclear]** C: **[unclear]**

Height: **5' 11"** Colour of Hair: **[unclear]** Colour of Eyes: **[unclear]** Complexion: **[unclear]**

Marks and Scars or Wounds: **[unclear]**

Qualifications and Special Courses: **[unclear]**

PROMOTIONS, RE-MUSTERINGS, ETC.

Rank	Date	Mustering or Trade	Decorations, Medals, etc.
1st Lt	13/5/43	600/100/43	
2nd Lt	13/2/44		

REMARKS: **407**

INITIAL CHECKER: **[Signature]**

FINAL CHECKER: **[Signature]**

CRIMES (SEE OVER)

National Archives of Australia NAA: A9301, 141268

Figure 14 - Gil's Certificate of Service and Discharge. Paperwork sourced from: Gilbert Ernest Stoneham's War Enlistment and Discharge Paperwork (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 2 August 2025.

Reference List

- .¹ [Stoneham, Gilbert Ernest](#) (2025), Virtual War Memorial Australia, accessed 24 July 2025.
- .² Interview with Gil's younger sister, Melva Matulin. Interview conducted by Grace Wegner on 27/7/2025
- .³ Phelan A (20 April 2016) [ANZAC Day Tributes: 'Biscuit Bombers to the Rescue'](#), The Sunday Morning Herald, accessed 22 July 2025.
- .⁴ Interview with Gil's son, Grant Stoneham. Interview conducted by Grace Wegner on 13/7/2025
- .⁵ Filmed Interview with Gil and Gladys for his 90th birthday celebration. Filmed by Belinda and Karen at "Generations in Focus" in 2014.
- .⁶ [Milne Bay 1942 - The RAAF's Forgotten Finest Hour](#) (2025 – Last Updated), RAAF Subpages, accessed 24 July 2025.
- .⁷ [Imperial Awards List](#) (2025), Australian Defence, accessed 29 July 2025.
- .⁸ [Gil's War and Service Paperwork](#) (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 4 August 2025.
- .⁹ [Unit Diary - 7TMO - Gil's Unit](#) (2025), National Archives of Australia, accessed 4 August 2025.
- .¹⁰ [Article on the Allies Take-Over of Tadjji](#) (26 April 1944), Trove, accessed 4 August 2025.

HaSS wordcount: 1,183

PART B – RESEARCH PROCESS – 485 WORDS

Writing this essay was the most challenging thing I have ever had to write, but also the most rewarding. I knew from the very beginning I wanted to participate in this competition because learning about history is one of my biggest passions. I originally wanted to write my essay about Harry Lock, a local man who was one of The Last Rats of Tobruk, which would've been a phenomenal story. This idea was quickly turned down because too much information was available, lots of news articles were available with his stories told before his passing. I then tried to research my mum's co-worker's grandfather, Stanley Heritage. He was not recommended because there was not enough information available. Even though I was so excited to write this essay, I was quickly disheartened and considered quitting in the first couple weeks. I knew my great-uncle Gil was available to research, so I quickly looked into him. There wasn't a lot of information, but enough to work with. I was able to interview his son, Grant and sister Melva for information.

When I conducted the interviews, I collected the information I needed, but I had so much fun and I learnt a lot about Gil and the person he was, a kind inspiration to many. I got the information I needed in half an hour in both interviews, but I spent another hour exchanging anecdotes about Gil and the family, I can't recall meeting Gil, but being able to write about him lets me get to know him better.

I was provided with so many anecdotes I was desperate to share. Then, I discovered majority of the essay had to be about the war experience itself. I had to pick and choose the stories I shared. Gil didn't like to share his war experience anyway, so I had to research more and get help. Gil's character and lovability could've been an essay on its own, I had the information for it. His character is what he is most remembered and admired for by my community, my family and myself.

With some initial help of Kate from the VWMA, and my family's history buff Uncle Zac, I learnt about Gil's war experience. Kate provided me with the unit diaries from his unit (7TMO), and my uncle had physical copies of Gil's personnel paperwork like his Service Record I referred to. He photographed Gil's grave and messaged a friend in Stansbury for a photo of the War Memorial there. I read these documents for hours and created a timeline to follow on Gil's war experience.

Towards finishing my essay, I guided myself with past winning entries, specifically Stephen Files's and Angus Leesue's. We attend the same high school, and the same primary school. I chose these examples to follow because of their high quality and my school's proud history in this competition, a history I hope to be part of.

HaSS wordcount: 485