

## Biography of Flying Officer Archie Campbell SWAN. RAAF. Att 620 Sqn RAF.

It was in 2015 that I was in Lyon, France walking to explore a local flea market when I came across a military cemetery. The cross shaped head stones had French soldiers' names.



Figure 1 Archie's Headstone

Walking on, I located a small section of the unmistakable shape of Commonwealth serviceman headstones. My curiosity picked up as Lyon is in the south of France, a long way from any allied battlefields.

I discovered that the headstones all belonged to aircrew, the majority to Royal Air Force crew. On reading each of the headstones I found an Australian airman. My immediate thought was that he is a long way from home.

A search of his name I found he was a West Australian boy, the same state I am from, in fact he was a country boy from Wagin. Of all the places to locate a WA boy.

After spending some time at his headstone, I left a toy Koala on his headstone to remind him that he had not been forgotten. Even though some time has passed since visiting him, my mind still goes back to this only Australian that rests in the cemetery so far from home.

It is time to tell his story.

Archie Campbell Swan was born on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1913 at Wagin, Western Australia to parents Edmund Thomas Campbell and Sarah Ellen Swan (nee Rudwick). Archie was the youngest of the siblings with two brothers and two sisters.

His parents married at Mount Margaret in 1907, east of Laverton which was extensively mined for gold in the late 1800's.

Archie's parents moved around Western Australia with his oldest brother born in West Perth, one of his sisters born in Bunbury and finally moving to Wagin where his father was listed as farming.



Figure 2 Archie Swan NAA File

Little is known about Archie's schooling or employment. It is recorded on his enlistment documents with the occupation as clerk.

In October 1938 Archie married Edith Olive Johnson. In 1940 their daughter was born, Patricia Ann Swan, but sadly she died in the same year of her birth. A second child a boy was born in September 1943.

In July 1941 at Perth Archie enrolled as a reserve into the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Archie's oldest brother, Duncan Campbell Swan made an application for a Commission in the RAAF, Medical Branch. Duncan held a Bachelor of Science with first class honours in Zoology from the University of Western Australia 1930 and a Master of Science from the University of South Australia 1934. He had worked for eleven years as an Entomologist with the University of Adelaide.

Duncan served with the RAAF medical branch in New Guinea from May 1943 to November 1945. His commission was terminated in August 1947.

Archie's other brother Edmund Campbell Swan in December 1941 was appointed as a Sub Lieutenant with the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RANVR). His commission was terminated in February 1946.

It was in March 1942 that Archie enlisted into the RAAF as aircrew, pilot training at Perth with the rank of aircraftman commencing his training at Pearce.

He conducted his pilot training within Western Australia until the end of 1942 before he was transferred to pilot training schools in Victoria in early 1943.

His log book had recorded ratings to fly the Tiger Moth DH82 and twin-engine Avro Anson, both training aircraft. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1942 he was award his Flying Badge (Wings), receiving his commission in January 1943 with the rank of Pilot Officer and by July 1943 appointment to Flying Officer.

Archie embarked for overseas service from Brisbane Queensland in April 1943. He was part of the Empire Air Training Scheme being one of about 27,500 RAAF pilots, navigators, wireless operators, air gunners and engineers joining squadrons based in Britain. On arriving in Britain in June 1943 he was transferred 3 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit in South Gerney conducting further pilot training until February 1944.

In April 1944 he was transferred to 620 Squadron Royal Air Force (RAF) which operated the four-engine bomber, Short Stirling Mark IV from RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire.

The squadron was preparing for D-Day completing mainly practice missions such as parachuting and glider towing. The squadron was also used to resupply Airborne Forces, mainly the Special Operation Executive (SOE) and the French Resistance throughout occupied France.



*Figure 3 Stirling Bomber. 620 Squadron unknown crew.*

It was on the night of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> May 1944 that Archie was piloting a Short Stirling bomber serial number LJ886 with five other crew members who took off from RAF Tarrant Rushton at 2231 hours on Operation Messenger heading to Saone-et-Loire area of Southern France.

It was at about 0100hours the bomber had reached its operation area when it was attacked and shot down by a twin engine Dornier 217-night fighter piloted by Oberleutnant Karl Heinz Schaffer based at Dôle-Tavaux airfield, a night fighter squadron.

The Stirling bomber crashed near the village of Poisson 80 km north west of Lyon, killing the entire crew. The night fighter was hit by return machine gun fire from the Stirling which also later crashed with Oberleutnant Schaffer wounded as a result of this action. The radar operator Feldwebel Karl Erdl survived the crash.

Oberleutnant Schaffer had a total of five air victories of Allied bombers, two Short Stirling bombers, two Lancaster bombers and an American B24 liberator bomber. Schaffer survived the war studying medicine where he practiced in Düsseldorf, Germany.



*Figure 4 Ober Lt Karl Schaffer & Observer*

Flying Officer Archie Campbell Swan and his crew were reported as missing on air operations presumed dead. The crew were recovered from the wreckage of the bomber and buried at La Guillotiere a suburb of Lyon. It was not until 1954 that Archie along with his crew were exhumed from La Guillotiere and re interred in the Lyon (La Doua) French National Cemetery.

There is a total of 39 Commonwealth airmen buried in the cemetery, Archie the only Australian. It also contains over 6,000 French soldiers who died in the First and Second World War, with a memorial plaque for 78 French Resistance members who were shot by the occupying Germans.

Flying Officer Archie Campbell, service number 415880 was killed in action, on air operations on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944 near Poisson France. He was 30 years of age and is remembered with honour.

The five other crew members who were killed and buried with Flying Officer Archie Campbell Swan are.

Flight Sergeant James Henry Bennison Lister. Navigator 27 years. RAF.  
Flying Officer William Joseph Tay. Air Bomber 29 years. RAF.  
Sergeant Aubrey Louis Arthur Ash-Smith. Flight Engineer 26 years. RAF  
Sergeant Donald Jones. Wireless Operator/Air Gunner. RAF  
Sergeant Eric George Swallow. Air Gunner 19 years. RAF.