Flight Lieutenant Ian Goodwin Swan PURSSEY DFC

[1923 - 1952]

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Flight Lieutenant Ian Purssey DFC served with the RAAF during World War Two in the Mediterranean Theatre. He served in the Western Desert and Italy, flying Curtis P40 (Kittyhawk) fighters and P51 (Mustang) fighters.

He later served in the Korean War flying Meteor 8 jet fighters and ground attack fighter / bombers.

He had completed 131 missions when he was shot down during a rocket attack on a ground target near Chinnampo on 22 April 1952.

Pre War Years

Ian Goodwin Swan Purssey, always known as "Bill", was born in Sydney on 24 March 1923. He was the eldest son of Roy and Ellen Purssey. Bill's father had served in the AIF in the Great War on the Western Front, and the 2nd AIF in the Middle East in World War Two.

After his family moved to Clayfield in Brisbane, he attended Church of England Grammar School (*Churchie*) in Brisbane, and was later employed as a bank officer before enlisting in the RAAF.

World War Two Service

Bill enlisted in the RAAF in 1942, and underwent training at:

- Elementary Flying Training School (8 EFTS) at Narrandera (NSW), flying Tiger Moths;
- Service Flying Training School (14 SFTS) at Aylmer (Ontario) under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) in Canada, flying Harvards; and
- Advanced Flying Training Unit (17 AFTU) at Wrexham (Wales), flying Miles Masters.

Bill's final training before going into action in Italy was at an Operational Training Unit (73 OTU) in Egypt, flying Kittyhawks.

He was posted to 450 Squadron RAAF (*The Desert Harassers*). He flew 102 operational sorties against enemy targets which were often heavily defended. His second operational tour in Italy was with No 3 Squadron RAAF where he flew another 46 sorties until the Axis powers surrendered.

Cutella, Italy 1944 with P40 Kittyhawks

Crete 1944 with P40 Kittyhawk (left).
His Mustang at Fano Italy February 1944 after crash landing on beach with ack-ack damage (right)

Cervia, Northern Italy c1945,
as a pilot of No 3 (Mustang) Squadron RAAF

Post World War Two

After the war Bill was discharged in 1946 but re-enlisted in the Citizen Air Force No 23 City of Brisbane (F) Squadron in 1949.

Korean War

In 1951 he was granted a permanent commission in the RAAF, and in December he was posted to 77 Squadron RAAF in Korea. After he had completed 30 combat missions, he was awarded the American Air Medal. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1952 after completing 110 operational missions.

Flight Lieutenant I.G.S. Purssey of No. 77 Squadron RAAF being congratulated after being invested with the United States Air Medal by Colonel H. Thyng USAF (left).

Meteor A77-189 (right).
Kimpo, South Korea. 1952.

FLTLT Purssey was flying a Meteor fighter (serial number A77-189, see photograph above) on his 131st mission, serving with 77 Squadron RAAF in Korea when he was shot down during a ground attack mission at Chinnampo Korea on 22 April 1952. FLTLT Purssey headed for the water, but his Meteor was on fire and a wing broke off. He was seen to eject but had no time to open his parachute before hitting the water. He was listed as missing, presumed killed.

Flight Lieutenant Purssey's body was never recovered, and he is therefore regarded as missing, presumed killed in action. He is commemorated at The Australian War Memorial and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery Korea, Busan, South Korea

The *Courier Mail* reported that the news reached his mother on the eve of Anzac Day. His mother, Ellen Purssey, was presented with his DFC by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth at a special investiture at Parliament House in Brisbane in March 1954, during the Royal Tour.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PURSSEY – Distinguished Flying Cross Citation

Flight-Lieutenant Purssey has flown with distinction on operations in support of the United Nations Forces in Korea. He has flown on one hundred and ten operational missions in Meteor aircraft and as a leader of the Squadron on ground attack strikes against heavily defended targets in North Korea, he has always pressed home his attacks to a low level with vigour and determination.

This Officer's courage and devotion to duty during his current tour of operations has set a fine example and has been in keeping with the highest traditions of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents

FOOTNOTES

The Purssey Family and the Club

An extract from Club's history (*United Service Club Queensland: The First Century 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton) provides an overview of the Purssey family and its association with the Club (p114):

In April, the committee was told of that a member, Flight Lieutenant IGS Purssey, had been reported missing in action in Korea. Ian Goodwin Purssey was a pilot with 77 Squadron and a casualty during the heavy air fighting in the early months of 1952. A former bank officer, he had enlisted in the RAAF in 1942 and had served with 450 Fighter Squadron (The Desert Harasser) and 3 Squadron before the end of the war. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1952,

before he was shot down on 22 April. Purssey was the Club's first casualty during the Korean War. His mother was presented with his DFC by the Queen in March 1954.

Four members of the family have been service members of the United Service Club. The original member was Captain Roy Swan Purssey who was repatriated as a sapper from France in 1918. In World War II he served as an infantry officer in the Middle East and in a training battalion. He played an active role in Club affairs in the early post-war years and his death in 1950 was confirmed to be as a result of his extended war service.

Ian Goodwin Swan Purssey was Roy's eldest son. The second son, Major Brian Swan Purssey was commissioned in the Royal Australian Medical Corps in 1951. Dr Purssey served 20 years in the CMF, including four years with the London Field Ambulance during studies and work in the UK. In 1967, Brian Purssey served in Vietnam with the Australian Surgical Training Team. A third son, Captain Ronald Swan Purssey, was commissioned into the Royal Australian Air Force in 1953 while serving with 23 City of Brisbane Squadron. After completing four years operational flying training, he spent three years in the UK, serving for a brief period with 410 City of London Royal Auxiliary Air Force. On returning to Australia he transferred to the Royal Australian Engineers, CMF, and retired in 1970 after 10 years' service. Ron Purssey served for six years on the Club's committee in the 1970s and, during his time as the Club's honorary architect, was responsible for the major transformation of the top bar, and the downstairs lounge, bar and dining room. Two of Ron Purssey's sons are now members of the Club; indeed something of a dynasty and one of several families where members of successive generations have been members of United Service Club.

No 77 SQUADRON RAAF IN KOREA

No. 77 Squadron was the only RAAF combat squadron committed to Korea by the Australian Government, and it remained on active service there until the end of the war. Initially the Australians were tasked with escorting American bombers to and from their targets as well as carrying out low-level air strikes of their own, attacking bridges, railway lines and other targets.

The Mustang fighters, with which the squadron had been equipped since the end of the Second World War, were easily adapted to the ground attack role in Korea. The Australians quickly developed a reputation for excellence in the ground attack role but this recognition came at a heavy price. Communist ground-based anti-aircraft defences continued to pose a formidable threat to all UNC aircrews, but those engaged in ground attack missions were particularly vulnerable as they had to fly at low levels to hit their targets.

In April 1951 No. 77 Squadron was temporarily withdrawn to Japan to be re-equipped with British-built Gloster Meteor jet fighters. After an intense two-month conversion the squadron returned to operational duties in Korea in July 1951. On its return the squadron was stationed at Kimpo air base, just outside Seoul, and would remain based there, alongside dozens of American and other UNC squadrons, until the end of the conflict.

The Meteors proved incapable of holding their own in 'dog fights' against the Chinese and Soviet MiG-15s and in September 1951 No. 77 Squadron found itself forbidden to carry out fighter sweeps over North Korea and relegated to second-line air defence duties. Frustrated by these restrictions and aware that the newly-acquired Meteor would not be replaced any time soon, the RAAF decided in December to once again employ No. 77 Squadron in the ground attack role.

This was something of a gamble as no other operator of the Meteor, including the Royal Air Force, had thought the aircraft was suited to this role. However the Meteor made up for its disappointing performance as a fighter by proving to be one of the best ground attack aircraft of the war.

In addition to its four 20-mm cannons the Australians installed rails to carry eight high-explosive rockets under the Meteor's wings, and this gave it the ability to deliver devastating and concentrated salvoes of firepower against ground targets

But once again casualties were high, with about one in four of No. 77 Squadron's pilots killed or captured by the time of the Armistice. At the end of the war, No. 77 Squadron had flown 18,872 sorties but lost 34 Australian pilots killed in battle or accidents and six prisoners of war, along with four British exchange pilots killed and one prisoner of war.