



WAR SERVICE OF FREDERICK TREWIN ARGUS Jnr. 1940-1945

By Bob Argus

In 1939 Mum and Dad were living a peaceful existence with their four children in their rented home at 153 Taylor Street, Toowoomba. Dad had a secure job as a male nurse at the Willowburn Mental Hospital and the hardships and privations of the Great Depression were becoming a distant memory. They looked forward to a brighter future for themselves and their four children.

That would soon be changed, however, due to the political and territorial ambitions of a vengeful madman with a toothbrush moustache on the other side of the world. The rise of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party for short) had been causing unease among other European leaders for some time. It all came to a head when, following Germany's annexation of Austria, the Nazis invaded Poland on 1st September 1939.

As a result of that invasion, and Hitler's refusal to comply with an English and French ultimatum to withdraw his invasion force, Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939.

That night, Mum and Dad were joined by fellow Australians right across the country in gathering around their wireless sets knowing that some kind of pronouncement was imminent from the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, leader of the United Australia Party.

Just after 9.15 p.m., the announcement came. "Fellow Australians", the Prime Minister began gravely, "it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that in consequence of a persistence by Germany, and her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that as a result Australia is also at war....."

Initially enlistment in the Australian services was slow with only one in six men of military age having enlisted by March 1940. However, a huge surge of volunteers came forward following France's capitulation to the Nazis in June 1940.

As a mother with four young children, no doubt Mum would have taken a lot of convincing that Dad, at thirty-two years of age, should enlist in the armed forces.

In any event, on 4th June 1940, he, along with his mate from the mental hospital, "Chick" Clayton, completed the form for enlistment in

the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) as a "hospital orderly".

Where the application form asked for particulars of his experience, Dad cited his three years as an honorary ambulance bearer with the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade (QATB) at Toowoomba during which time he had completed a course leading to the award of a St John's Ambulance First Aid and Home Nursing Certificate.

He also referred to his six and a half years at the Willowburn Mental Hospital where he had attained, by examination, a Mental Nursing Certificate.



The Argus family taken around the time of Dad's enlistment in 1940. From left Carmel, Dad, Janice on Mum's lap, Freddie and Neil (sitting)

He also included that his original trade was that of a general blacksmith and farrier and that he had served an apprenticeship with W.J. Berigan, General Blacksmith and Farrier, formerly of Margaret Street, Toowoomba.

He further stated that he had been educated as an infant at Toowoomba South State School for Girls and Infants and later at Harristown State School. He was also enrolled for eighteen months at the Toowoomba State High School and Technical College, having passed the High School Examination.

His previous military experience consisted of three years part-time service as a Private in No. 4 Platoon, A Company, 25th Battalion (1908 quota) under the compulsory military service training scheme that was established following the First World War.

The 25th Battalion was a Toowoomba-based battalion of the Australian Army's Citizen Force and all young men were required to undertake three years of part-time service which included weekly drill sessions at the Drill Hall and parade ground on the corner of Margaret and Kitchener Streets, and training weekends away totalling twelve days per year. I remember Dad telling me once that he would ride a horse from his parents' home in Gostwyck Street across town to the Mount Lofty rifle range for shooting practice with the Battalion.

Following his trade test and medical examination, Dad was found to be fit and suitable for service as a nursing orderly with the RAAF. The interviewing officer, in his report (which Dad would never have got to see) made the comment "very favourable type – alert- answers readily". He also noted that Dad had indicated that he was prepared to serve anywhere and to "rough it".

It would seem little wonder then that, in the following month, he would receive a letter from the Recruiting Officer requesting him to report at 8.30 a.m. on 15th July 1940 to the Recruiting Office in Brisbane where he would be enlisted as a Nursing Orderly with the rank and pay of Aircraftman, Class I. From there he would be entrained immediately to the recently established RAAF Station at Amberley, some 5 miles (8 km) west of Ipswich.

As was the standard practice, the enlistment was for the duration of the War and for a period of up to twelve months thereafter.

The daily pay applicable to Dad's appointment was seven shillings and sixpence (75 cents) per day, plus a separation allowance payable to married men of three shillings (30 cents) per day and one shilling (ten cents) per day for each child under the age of sixteen years. The payment of separation allowance was subject to the airman making an allotment of at least three shillings per day.

The letter also advised that airmen were liable for service either within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Upon enlistment, Dad was allotted the service number 22924.



New recruits - Dad and his mate "Chick" Clayton

The Amberley RAAF Station was established only one month before Dad arrived with the formation of Squadron 24 which, several months later, was transferred to Townsville.

The 882 acre (357 hectare) Amberley site had been acquired by the Department of Defence in December 1938. When war was declared some nine months later, the only buildings that had been constructed were a guardhouse at the then front gate, a large hangar, a hospital and an air traffic control tower. These had been built in brick. However, the onset of war necessitated buildings constructed since then being hurriedly put together in timber and fibro.

At Amberley Dad was initially attached to 3 Recruit Depot, formed just a fortnight earlier, where he underwent recruit drill training as a member of No. 4 Recruit Drill Course. Drill training should have come fairly easy to him, given his part-time service in the 25th Battalion.

On 9th September 1940 Dad had his first experience of Melbourne to where his great grandparents had migrated from England almost one hundred years before. He had been posted to RAAF Station Headquarters at Laverton where he underwent six weeks specialist training for his role as a nursing orderly.



Dad visiting his mother and father at their home "Glenelby" in Gostwyck Street, Toowoomba while on leave from the RAAF

The subjects that he studied and subsequently passed included:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Medical and surgical nursing
- Recognition of theatre instruments
- Ward management
- Hygiene of patients
- Cooking for the sick; and
- Administration, preparing and checking medical statistics and records.

On 5th November 1940, Dad was back at the Amberley base where the RAAF Hospital was under the command of No. 3 Service Flying Training School (3SFTS). This unit was formed on 21st October and, along with No. 3 Recruit Depot, was one of only two units operating at the Amberley base at that time.



Dad, home on leave, poses for a photo with his sister, Daisy Thistlewood, and her children (from left) Evelyn, Teddy and Daisy

The prime function of 3SFTS was the training of new pilots under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). Under the Scheme, RAAF trainee pilots received their initial training in Australia, then undertook further training in Canada, before going into active service in Europe, north Africa and the Middle East.

The Unit consisted of 12 officers and 228 airmen and used Wirraways and Avro aircraft taking off and landing on the grass runways of the Amberley base.

An RAAF history of the Amberley airfield informs that: *"During the early period of its existence, the school was beset by difficulties and trying conditions. Heavy rains falling between late December 1940 and March 1941,*

frequently made the aerodrome unserviceable, and much of the flying training had to be carried out from Archerfield and Maryborough. The torrential rain made it apparent that 'all weather' runways were essential and their construction started immediately."

Dad's role as a nursing orderly involved attending to patients in the hospital ward, rendering first aid as necessary and providing whatever other medical assistance was required.

On 1st December 1940, Dad received his first promotion – from Aircraftman Class I (AC1) to Leading Aircraftman (LAC). This was followed four months later (1st April 1941) with a further promotion to the rank of Corporal.

Around this time, Mum had relocated the family to Sandgate so that they would be nearer to Dad when he came home on leave. Here she was joined by her unmarried sister, (our aunty) Annie O'Brien, who had travelled down from Rockhampton to help her with the children. She certainly needed this help because, on 30th May 1941, fifth child, Ronald Trewin Argus, entered the world at the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

Apparently, big sister Jan, fully three years old herself, was quite disappointed to learn she had a baby brother instead of the baby sister she was anticipating and said that she would call him "Tim" after a neighbour's pup. So she did, and Ron has been known as "Tim" ever since.

On the other side of the world, the Allies were experiencing mixed results. The British had routed the Italians in northern Libya and Australian forces had performed magnificently in firstly capturing and then defending for eight months the strategically important Mediterranean harbour town of Tobruk.

However, Australian forces sent in March 1941 to northern Greece to assist the British and Greek armies to fortify Greece against an expected Nazi invasion were forced to retreat to southern Greece and were evacuated in late April. The Allies also lost the island of Crete, with around 3,000 Allied soldiers taken

prisoner, but did make good gains in Syria and Lebanon during June and July.

On the political front, colleagues of the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had lost confidence in his ability to lead the country at this critical time. On 26th August 1941, he was replaced by Arthur Fadden, leader of the Country Party, the coalition partner of the United Australia Party.

The Fadden Government did not last long, however, as two Independent members of parliament, who had previously been aligned to the government, switched their allegiance to the Labor Party. This gave Labor leader John Curtin the numbers required to form a minority government and he became Prime Minister on 7th October 1941.

This would have given Dad two reasons to celebrate during that month. On 1st October 1941, he received a further promotion to the rank of Sergeant and, one week later, Australia had a Labor Prime Minister. Dad was never overly fond of Robert Menzies but, even in later years, always spoke very highly of John Curtin and his successor, Ben Chifley.

Later that year, fears that Japan might enter the War were realised when 353 Japanese fighter planes, bombers and torpedo planes carried out a massive air attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii.

The purpose of the raid was to prevent the US Navy from getting involved in military action that was planned in south-east Asia against territories held by the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands.

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbour was highly successful with all eight US battleships damaged, with four sunk. As well as damage to three destroyers, three cruisers and a minelayer, 188 US aircraft were destroyed in the attack.

Just ten hours after the Pearl Harbour attack, a similar raid on the US base in the Philippines resulted in the destruction of all US aircraft based there.

Further Japanese victories followed and, by early 1942, the Japanese army was sweeping down the Malay Peninsula towards the British bastion of Singapore. On 15th February, the British commander in Singapore unconditionally surrendered and the Japanese occupation of the island began.



Leading Aircraftman Aubrey ("Bill") Argus

Dad's youngest brother, Aubrey (also known as "Bill") who had enlisted in April 1941, was fortunate enough to leave Singapore when the RAAF squadrons were evacuated back to Australia just before the Japanese invaded the island.

Dad and Bill's cousin, Malcolm Hallford from Griffith NSW, was not so lucky. Malcolm was a Private in the Australian Army's 2/10 Field Ambulance. Captured by the Japanese during the fall of Singapore, he was one of more than 100,000 Allied troops to become prisoners of war. Sadly he died in the prisoner of war camp at Sandakan on Borneo on 29th March 1945.



Pte Malcolm Ernest Hallford

On 19th February 1942, the War came to Australia when more than 240 Japanese aircraft, both fighters and bombers, attacked Darwin in two air raids, just one hour apart. When it was all over, 243 Allied servicemen and civilians had been killed with more than 300 others wounded. Eight ships in the harbour had been sunk and, along with twenty aircraft, most military and civil facilities in the town had been destroyed. Following on so quickly after the fall of Singapore, and fearing a loss of morale among the population, the Australian Government announced that only seventeen people had been killed.

Prime Minister Curtin clashed with the powerful British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in insisting that Australian troops serving overseas be brought home to bolster numbers for Australia's defence. As a result, the AIF's 6th and 7th divisions, which had been fighting in the Middle East, came home to play a very active role in the New Guinea campaign.

Unlike New Guinea, the defence of northern Australia was almost entirely an air war. Japanese aircraft would attack targets in Australia, including Broome, Katherine, Port Hedland, Derby, Wyndham and Townsville, as

well as making regular raids on Darwin. In response, RAAF and American airmen would conduct counter-raids on known Japanese bases on Timor and other islands of the Arafura Sea.

On 10th July 1942, Dad was posted to No. 1 Embarkation Depot, which had taken over the Melbourne Showgrounds at Ascot Vale, for his medical examination, kitting out and preparation for service in the forward operational area of northern Australia.

On 3rd August, 1942, Dad arrived at the RAAF Operational Base at Birdum in the Northern Territory before departing three days later on his posting to RAAF Station Headquarters in Darwin. While here he received a further promotion to the rank of Flight Sergeant on 1st October 1942. This entitled him to wear a crown above his three sergeant stripes or, as Dad would refer to them, "three hooks and a crown".



RAAF Flight Sergeant Insignia

The RAAF hospital in Darwin was located at the RAAF base which continued to be the target for Japanese air strikes since the initial attacks in February. Twenty-four Japanese bombing raids were recorded in and around

Darwin during the forty-six weeks that Dad was based there.

It was while here at the Darwin RAAF Hospital that Dad had an encounter that would cause him to question his faith in the religion in which he had been raised. While Dad was attending to patients, a Church of England chaplain came into the ward, handing out to those in the beds cigarettes provided by the Red Cross. When he turned to leave, Dad said: "What about these boys over here?" while pointing to some patients who had not been recipients of the padre's largesse. "No, they're not Church of England", the chaplain replied as he left.

Dad was so disgusted with the minister's response that he mentally resigned himself from the Church of England and tried to scratch the "E" in "C OF E" from the dog tags that he was required to wear around his neck to identify him in the event of death or injury.



Dad's RAAF dog tags

As well as hospital duties, the nursing orderlies sometimes accompanied other RAAF units on assignments where the need could arise for medical assistance.

Dad never spoke much about his wartime experiences but we know from a post-war letter that he wrote to the Air Board that, in May 1943, he was sent as medical escort on a ship called the *Islander* which sailed from Darwin carrying RAAF personnel and stores to North Goulburn Island, Milingimbi and Wessel Island along the north coast of Australia, on the way to its eventual destination which was Thursday Island. The *Islander* was a 70 ton merchant vessel that had been chartered by the RAAF and was accompanied on the voyage by the Royal Australian Navy corvette *HMAS Latrobe*.

The two vessels, with Dad on board the *Islander*, were steaming out of Darwin harbour at around 10.00 a.m. on 2nd May when two air raid warnings were received. In his monthly report to the Naval Board, the Commanding Officer of *HMAS Latrobe* recorded that: "Twenty-one Japanese bombers were sighted passing well clear to the North-Eastward. They were engaged by shore defences, and dropped their bombs in the direction of the aerodrome. During this attack "Latrobe" and "Islander" remained under way in the vicinity of the boom defences, passed through the boom gate at 1045 I.K., and proceeded to sea."



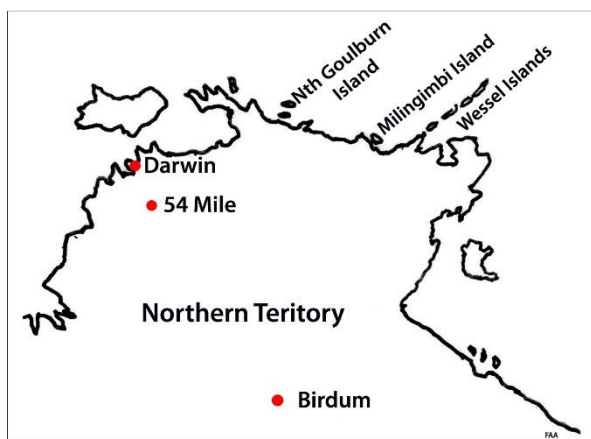
HMAS Latrobe

The Japanese bombers were accompanied by Zero fighter planes and, in the ensuing air battle with RAAF spitfires, two Australians were killed and eight spitfires were lost although little damage was done to the airfield.

The convoy arrived at North Goulburn Island on the afternoon of Monday, 3rd May, unloaded the stores and personnel by late the following

afternoon and set off with the Navy cutter *HMAS Maroubra* in tow for Milingimbi.

Milingimbi Island is an aboriginal settlement off the coast of Arnhem Land where the RAAF had established an airfield. The ships arrived there at 12.30 pm on Wednesday, 5th May and anchored offshore as there were no dock facilities there from which to unload. Equipment and supplies had to be placed into smaller vessels and taken to shore by members of the Army's 2/5 Docks Company. The Commanding Officer of *HMAS Latrobe* commented that: *"Discharge at Milingimbi, with the limited facilities available, was only possible during about three hours each side of high water, and persistent strong easterly winds with rough sea impeded unloading throughout, and caused total cessation of unloading during many periods when it could otherwise have been possible. Consequently, this stage of the operation was not completed until early morning 10th May."*



[Map by Frank Argus]

Map of the Top End showing locations mentioned in the text

Dad's assignment was to terminate at Milingimbi and he had no option but to wait for transport back to his unit in what he would later tell us was called "the land of wait a while". He was still waiting on the morning of Sunday, 9th May when seven Japanese bombers descended on Milingimbi.

In his book *Darwin Spitfires: The Real Battle for Australia*, author Anthony Cooper describes the day's events as follows: *"It was at 10.40*

a.m. that Milingimbi's No. 308 Radar Station detected incoming formation at 110 kilometres to the north – about 20 minutes flight time away. The airfield had no AA (anti-aircraft) guns, so there was little that could be done except to wait and watch the tight formation of seven bombers cruise overhead and drop their load of twenty 100 kg bombs. The Japanese lead bombardier's aim was good, for ten of those bombs exploded in the airfield area.

However, the undeveloped airfield contained little of value and so most of those bombs exploded in the bush, the damage limited to the splintering of trees and the scattering of clouds of bark and sand. Only one bomb burst on the runway itself, but the effect of this was negligible as the Japanese had dropped anti-personnel bombs – nicknamed 'daisy-cutters' by the troops as they were fused to scatter shrapnel far and wide at ground level, rather than to shift a great mass of earth as high explosive bombs did. As a result, only a tiny crater was left in the runway, which was therefore effectively undamaged.....

The Islander, a 70 tonne coastal vessel under charter to the RAAF, had picked a bad time to call in to Milingimbi en route to Wessel Island further east. It was carrying Flying Officer Richardson and 20 men of the RAAF's No. 1 Mobile Works Squadron (1MWS) in order to build a new radar station there – in response to the Japanese floatplanes' recent strikes against Allied coastal shipping. Unloading was interrupted by the raid, and the air force men onboard were forced to watch the airfield bombing, and counted all 20 bombs falling there. Then they got to witness the action closer up, because the bombers repositioned themselves for a second run, this time on the Islander moored in the channel. The bombs straddled the ship in a wall of white water bomb bursts, catching the men of the 2/5 Docks Company on the water.....The Japanese bombers, having completed their double orbit, droned back out to sea still in perfect formation."

In the official log of the *Islander*, the ship's master, Captain Stanton, recorded that: *"Whilst manoeuvring the ship to avoid being hit in confined waters, the vessel was straddled by seven bombs"*. He further reported that Sapper Vic Paget had died shortly after being hit by a bomb splinter that opened up his *"complete lower abdomen"*. Sapper Paget was a member of the Australian Army's 5th Docks Operating Company which had been transferring supplies from the *Islander* to the shore.

There were also several other casualties who were requiring Dad's immediate attention. The ship's First Mate had received a shrapnel or bullet wound through the right upper arm; another sapper suffered a fractured shoulder blade while another had a slight abdominal wound; one Leading Aircraftman (LAC) had a fractured leg; another LAC suffered lung wounds while another had wounds to the right shoulder. After receiving first aid treatment from Dad, the wounded were evacuated by air to No. 1 Medical Receiving Station (1MRS) located at Coomalie Creek not far from North Western Area Headquarters at 54 Mile, south of Darwin. Two RAAF personnel suffering shock were also evacuated by air.

On delivering the casualties, Dad was personally commended for his good work by the Commanding Officer of 1MRS, Wing Commander D.S. Thomson. In his monthly report to Headquarters for the month of May 1943, Wing Commander Thomson wrote: *"We dealt with rather more than our average number of casualties. As a result of an air-raid on an A.O.B. (Advanced Operational Base) 250 miles from here, 9 casualties were flown here within a few hours of the raid, which was good work on the part of those concerned with their transport to hospital. Although two of these cases were seriously injured, all have made very satisfactory progress"*.

Other sources state that a local indigenous resident was also killed during the raid.

This was not a good week for Dad as he had no sooner returned from Milimimbi than he

received the news that his mother had passed away in Toowoomba on 11th May. Unfortunately, to his eternal regret, he did not get home in time to attend her funeral.

In a letter dated 10th October 1943 to Vie Argus, wife of cousin Dick Argus in Western Australia, Dad's sister, Daisy Thistlewood, described the situation this way: *"It was a terrible blow to poor old Dad as he and Mum were such good cobbers always and then for Dad to have lost two brothers also in 10 months....."*¹

All the boys got home except Freddie and he arrived too late. He had to come from Darwin. Mum had a big operation, and she took a bad turn on the 3rd day. We all got a terrible shock. None of us thought we were going to lose her so soon. She was only 57.

Freddie's still at Darwin and Aub escaped from Singapore and is stationed at Bundaberg. I do hope they don't get sent away from Australia. Mum worried terribly over the boys and the War."

At his next proficiency assessment on 27th June 1943, Dad was rated as having "superior" proficiency and was "specially recommended" (the highest rating) for further promotion. This would have taken him to the rank of Warrant Officer which probably would have put him behind a desk. Perhaps fortunately for him given that circumstance, further promotion was not forthcoming and he remained a Flight Sergeant until the end of the War.

As from 1st September 1943, the RAAF changed the designation of "Nursing Orderly" to "Medical Orderly".

Dad's term of service in the Northern Territory was completed with his final three months attached to RAAF Headquarters North Western Area at 54 Mile, that same distance south of Darwin.

On 23rd November 1943, he commenced duty at the RAAF Hospital at Maryborough,

¹ Grandad's brother Bill had died in Toowoomba on 19th July 1942. Brother Jack was killed near his farm

in Western Australia on 8th November 1942 when he fell from a load of hay on a moving tabletop truck.

Queensland, under the command of No. 3 Wireless Air Gunners School (3 WAGS).

Meanwhile the War was raging in New Guinea with the Australians having considerable success at Milne Bay and halting the Japanese advance along the Kokoda Track to Port Moresby.

The Americans had established their 804th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron at Nadzab, around 26 miles (42 km) from Lae in New Guinea. Australia's 7th Division was fighting in the Markham Valley (inland from Lae) and the 9th Division was advancing along the coast past Lae to Finschhafen. With heavy casualties, the air evacuation of patients from these campaigns was placing extra pressure on the American Squadron and they asked Australia for assistance.

As a consequence, the Air Board gave approval in February 1944 for the establishment of RAAF No. 1 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit (1MAETU) for service in New Guinea. Dad was one of the few specially selected to undertake training in air evacuation prior to being assigned to the fledgling Unit.

On 7th April 1944, he reported, along with other volunteer medical orderlies, to the Medical Training Unit at Laverton in Melbourne to undergo three weeks training before joining the Unit. Fifteen nursing sisters had also been selected to join 1MAETU and they undertook their training at the same time at RAAF Larundel, also in Melbourne.

During the training, lectures were given on subjects as diverse as:

- anoxia (total depletion of oxygen in the body);
- physiology of changes in flight;
- aircraft recognition and loading;
- tropical medicine;
- tropical hygiene;
- security;
- altitude medicine;
- basic knowledge of Army medical organisations as the majority of

patients being evacuated would be Army;

- use of flying equipment e.g. oxygen and drugs;
- selection of cases for evacuation and practical problems of inflight care;
- discipline in the air;
- emergency procedures in the air; and
- jungle and ocean survival.

Practical training in water survival and swimming at the Melbourne Baths and a hypobaric chamber run at Point Cook were also included. The latter test was to check the trainees' ability to maintain equilibrium while flying at high altitudes. Training in pistol shooting was also conducted and the medical orderlies, including Dad, were each issued with a .38 Smith and Wesson revolver.

Their new Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Winston Kiel, was on hand to welcome the trainees and apprise them of the type of work and conditions they could expect in the new Unit. Squadron Leader Kiel had been a medical practitioner at Melbourne's Prince Henry Hospital prior to joining the RAAF. For the past several months, he and twelve medical orderlies had been working with the US Army's air evacuation of casualties at Nadzab in New Guinea with a view to learning about the American organisation and methods. These would then be applied in the new Australian Unit.

1MAETU was originally based as a lodger unit at the RAAF base at Sandgate in Queensland, until their headquarters at Nadzab, about 26 miles (42 km) from Lae in New Guinea, were ready for occupation. Dad arrived at Sandgate on 8th May 1944 and, with other members of his Unit flew in a Dakota C47 aircraft from Archerfield to Port Moresby, with stops at Rockhampton and Townsville, on 25th June.

While in Port Moresby, Unit members were staged through No. 21 Medical Clearing Station (21MCS) where they assisted in other units and with air evacuation of patients. Dad's first evacuation flight was on 30th June from Port Moresby to Archerfield via Townsville. On the following day, he escorted patients from

Archerfield, via Sydney's Mascot RAAF Station, to Melbourne's Essendon RAAF base. Patients requiring specialist treatment were taken to Melbourne.



RAAF PMB Martin Mariner flying boat

To return to his Unit, he was required to "hitch a ride" wherever he could and, on this occasion, he secured a flight on an RAAF Martin Mariner flying boat from the RAAF Flying Boat Base at Hamilton, located on the Brisbane River. The flight took him back to Port Moresby via Cairns.

In August, Dad proceeded, with other members of his Unit, to Nadzab where an advance party had prepared the campsite and constructed buildings from materials sourced locally.

The accommodation was two-man Army style tents with the nursing sisters in a separate compound enclosed by a kunai grass fence with a guard on the gate for their security. For safety reasons, the sisters were not allowed to leave their compound without a male escort.

Each evacuation team consisted of a nursing sister and a medical orderly. Initially, they flew with the Americans to become familiar with the US aircraft and crews. Their patients came from all Allied nations but were mainly American and Australian servicemen. On one evacuation flight, Dad was given a US Air Force ring by a grateful US airman.

Dad's log book shows that his first assignment from Nadzab was a flight "from Nadzab via Hollandia (today called Jayapura) to Tadjji to escort patients to Lae and return to Nadzab".



1 MAETU Camp Nadzab 1944

A typical day on evacuation duty began with rising at 3.00 a.m. for breakfast at 3.30 a.m. and ready to fly out at daybreak. An early start was vital as heavy cloud usually built up in the morning to become torrential rain in the afternoon, often making flying impossible. On occasions, a return to Nadzab would have to be delayed until the next morning.



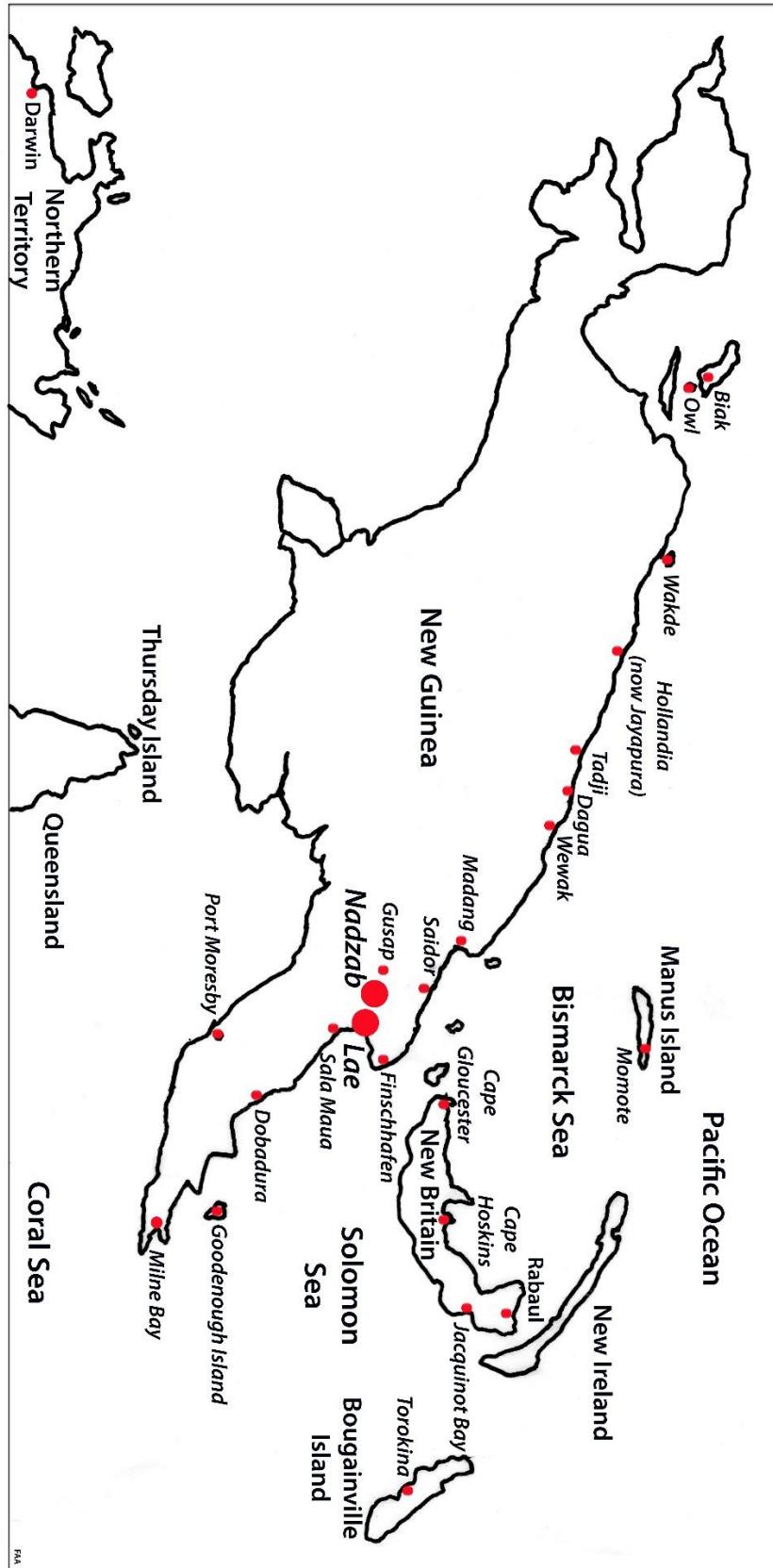
RAAF Dakota C47 aircraft

The main transport used by the evacuation teams were Dakota C47 aircraft, affectionately dubbed "biscuit bombers" by the Aussie diggers for their low level flying to make food drops. The planes were fitted with metal litter brackets to take the stretchers bearing the patients. There were six litters, in stacks of three, on either side of the aircraft. Metal seats along the fuselage were available for the walking wounded.

On the forward flight, the plane would be loaded with supplies, equipment and munitions destined for the battle front. Dad and the sister had to fit in as best they could.

24045				Time carried forward: 24045	
Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times Day Night
1-11-44 0420	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	From Hospital	Weather very bad. Weather	50
" 0820	"	"	Proceeding from Hospital via	Wichita	25
" 0940	"	"	via		4-20
" 1510	"	"	to	Tadji	1-50
2-11-44 0645	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Proceeding from Hospital to Hospital & West of Patients		3-20
3-11-44 0645	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Proceeding from Hospital via	Jourdenville	5-55
" 1245	"	"	on behalf of Patients to Ambulance		5-0
4-11-44 2315	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Returning to	Jourdenville	4-15
5-11-44 0455	C47 C1245	"	Proceeding from Hospital via	Jourdenville	5-25
6-11-44 0600	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Proceeding from Patients to Ambulance		5-40
" 1225	"	"	on behalf of Patients to Ambulance		4-45
7-11-44 0135	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Proceeding from Ambulance via	Jourdenville	4-10
" 0725	"	"	via	St. Mary's	3-55
" 1235	C47 C1245	"	to	St. Mary's	2-0
8-11-44 0420	C47 C1245	1st Lt. Rouse	Proceeding from Hospital to Tadji		2-20
" 0915	"	"	to return to Hospital		2-30
" 1215	"	"	to return to Hospital		15

Page from Dad's Flight Log Book in his handwriting. The first entry records a flight that was turned around due to bad weather before taking off again some three hours later.



Map showing the centres in New Guinea and the adjacent islands from and to which Dad transferred patients, as recorded in his flight log book, during his time with 1MAETU [Map by Frank Argus]

After the contents of the plane were unloaded at the destination, litters were put in place in the aircraft to take the wounded and the loading of patients began.

Loading and unloading had to take place quickly or both patients and crew could suffer heat stress in the unlined interior of the Dakota under the hot tropical sun.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

OG3345

Two of Dad's 1MAETU colleagues, Sergeant "Smoky" Dawson and Senior Sister Elizabeth Bray ensuring patient comfort before a flight from New Guinea to Australia

Medical documents were handed over to the MAETU team by the attending medical personnel. The condition of each patient was checked and psychotic patients were sedated and suitably restrained on the litter.

Battle-scarred "nerve cases" were the most challenging to deal with and they made up 15% of all wounded evacuated from New Guinea. As well as pre-sedating before the flight, many required an additional oral dose of sodium amytal or Nembutal during the flight.

Some patients who had never flown before also had to be reassured and settled down,

particularly when the plane encountered turbulence or dropped sharply after entering an air pocket. Where a patient's medical condition was such that they could not fly at high altitudes, suitable instructions had to be given to the pilot. On the other hand, it was more comfortable for patients with broken bones to fly at higher altitudes where the air was more stable, thus ensuring a smoother flight.

During the flight, various medical observations were taken of each patient and suitably recorded. Fluids and nourishment were provided in flight as well as oxygen or any other medical attention that proved necessary.

As the destination drew near, information was radioed to the airstrip on the imminent arrival of the patients and the number of ambulance vehicles that would be needed to convey them to the hospital. Medical documents and x-rays were handed over to the ambulance and the patients were unloaded under the supervision of the evacuation team. Their responsibility for the patients then ended and they returned to their Unit at Nadzab.

The flights carried their own risks, particularly when flying above enemy-held territory or through mountainous terrain enveloped in thick tropical cloud which could build up quickly. To minimise the risk, the evacuation aircraft flew out over the sea wherever possible.

MAETU staff received weekly briefings from the Army on the current military situation in the areas where they flew. These provided an overview of the current fighting and how a battle was progressing near the areas where they were required to land to pick up casualties. Instructions were also given on escape routes to be taken if grounded in various areas, as well as where the natives could be trusted to assist and where they should be avoided. The language barrier could be a problem in communicating with the natives and Dad and other Unit members picked up a smattering of Pidgin English with which he would sometimes amuse us in post-War years.

On one occasion, a flight carrying patients from Wakde to Finschhafen experienced engine

trouble and had to ditch into the sea. In preparation for the crash, Senior Sister Nancy McBean and medical orderly Sergeant McDonald had little time to secure the litter patients to the fuselage and help the walking patients with their life belts. This was achieved with such calm that no panic was engendered among the patients.

The American pilot was able to perform a perfect forced landing. Fortunately, US amphibious ducks were conducting exercises in the area at the time and came swiftly to the aid of the sinking aircraft with all being rescued with no casualties.



1 MAETU Medical Orderlies with their Commanding Officer. Back (from left) Sergeants Clayton and Dodd; Front (from left) Flight Sergeant Argus, Squadron Leader Kiel, Sergeant Dawson with their mascot "Rusty". [Taken at Nadzab in 1944 by Sister Lucy MacKenzie (now Lane)]

While on a visit home on leave in October 1944, Dad called in to his old alma mater Toowoomba State High School and Technical College where he caught up with one of his former teachers, Hunter Poon. In the 1944 edition of the school magazine *Acta*, Mr. Poon recorded that: *"Staff-Sergeant (sic) Fred Argus called in while on a brief visit to his people. Fred was one of our early students, and I was very pleased to see him. He asked about his classmates, Ken Marlow, Tom Hogg etc., and had seen Les Postle, Roy Robertson. Brother Bert is in the A.I.F. Fred is on the job of transporting hospital cases from N.G. and has*

had a ton of thrilling experiences in his few years of air service."

Staff-Sergeant is a rank in the Army which is signified by the same three stripes and a crown that Dad wore on his RAAF uniform. Dad's brother Bert (Albert William Argus) had enlisted in the Army on 19th February 1942 and was a Trooper in 11 Motor Regiment.

In March 1945, the Americans moved out of Nadzab as part of their island hopping push to retake the Philippines. The American planes, which the Unit had been using, were no longer available so 1MAETU moved its camp 26 miles (42 km) to a position beside the air strip at Lae where RAAF 33 Squadron was based. Team members then flew with that squadron on their medical evacuation missions.

An extensive article about 1MAETU, which appeared in several Australian newspapers in May 1945, informed readers that members of the Unit had flown *"nearly two million miles since the unit went into operation. In that period they have evacuated more than 8,000 patients from the forward areas. They fly approximately 75 hours a month which, as any pilot will testify, is a good average even for regular aircrew members.....Since this RAAF unit began duty, nurses and orderlies have not lost one patient"*.

The same article also included the following paragraph: *"The Flying Nurses are reluctant to discuss their own exciting experiences but talk freely of the stoicism of some of their patients. Medical orderly Fred Argus of Toowoomba, Queensland, told of a wounded New Britain native whom he flew to a base hospital in New Guinea, who had walked for an hour and a half with a gaping bullet hole in a buttock"*.

While Dad was serving in New Guinea, Mum was having a tough time at home. She had moved the family back to Toowoomba and they were living at 20 Ranfurly Street in Newtown. Anxiety for a husband serving in a theatre of war, while having sole responsibility for the raising of five young children, was taking its toll on her health. Dad was forced to apply for an early discharge, a request that was initially turned down by the authorities. Mum enlisted

the help of local State Member Jack Duggan in support of the next application.

On completion of twelve months service in New Guinea, on 2nd August 1945, Dad was posted to No. 3 Personnel Depot in Brisbane while his latest discharge application was being considered.

Three days later, the Americans dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima causing widespread deaths and destruction. When no surrender was forthcoming, a second bomb was dropped three days later on the city of Nagasaki with similar devastating results.

On 15th August, Japanese Emperor Hirohito gave a radio address where he announced to the Japanese people the surrender of Japan to the Allies. This was formally ratified when the Emperor's representatives signed the instrument of unconditional surrender on board *USS Missouri* on 2nd September 1945.

Four days later, on 6th September 1945, Dad received his discharge "on compassionate grounds" after five years, one month and 22 days service in the RAAF.

For his service, he was awarded the following medals which he would proudly don and wear to each Anzac Day dawn service:

- 1939-45 Star;
- Pacific Star;
- Defence Medal;
- War Medal; and
- Australia Service Medal.



Dad's medals. His "Returned from Active Service" badge is in the top right hand corner of the photo

He also qualified for the award of a "Returned from Active Service" badge.

If he had any regrets about not being able to join his former colleagues of 1MAETU in repatriating Australian prisoners of war back home, he never mentioned it. For Dad, the War was over, and his rehabilitation into civilian life was about to begin.

EPILOGUE

The massive destruction and misery wrought on both sides in World War 2 should have demonstrated that there are no real winners.

Peaceful resolution and cooperation is always a better option. More than seventy years have passed since the end of the War and Japan is now our ally.

There are various stories of ex-servicemen of both sides making lasting friendships with former adversaries and their families. Japan is our second largest trading partner and this relationship is very beneficial for both of our economies and our individual wellbeing.

The Japanese people are welcome visitors to our country and a multitude of Australians have enjoyed the friendship and hospitality of our northern neighbours.

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