

Sergeant Herbert Alan Clements (404025)

Royal Australian Air Force, attached No. 11 Squadron (RAF)

Born: 2 December 1919, Brisbane, Queensland

Died: 19 February 1942, Middle East, aged 22

Commemorated: Alamein Memorial, El Alamein War Cemetery, Egypt; Australian War Memorial, Canberra aviationmuseumwa.org.au [Australian War Memorial](#)

The attached illustrated envelope and letter sent from the Middle East in July 1941, together with his Roll of Honour and unit records, preserve the memory of a young Queensland airman whose life bridged the worlds of suburban cinema and front-line air operations. They stand as a testament to his service, his creativity, and the enduring bonds between those who served and the communities they left behind.

Sergeant Herbert Alan Clements was born in Brisbane, Queensland, on 2 December 1919, the son of Herbert and Elsie Clements of Alderley. Before the war he worked as a projectionist at the Alderley theatre in Brisbane, where he formed close ties with the local community and his employer, Charles David Biles Ireland, the theatre's proprietor.

Clements enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on 26 April 1940 in Queensland, service number 404025. Under the Empire Air Training Scheme he underwent aircrew training, qualifying as an observer, responsible for navigation, bombing, and reconnaissance duties in multi-engined aircraft. On completion of training, he was posted overseas to the Middle East, where many Australian airmen were attached to Royal Air Force units.

By mid-1941 Alan was serving with No. 11 Squadron (RAF), a Bristol Blenheim light bomber and reconnaissance unit operating under Middle East Command. The squadron flew hazardous missions over Egypt, Libya, and the surrounding region, including anti-shipping patrols, bombing raids on Axis supply lines, and long-range reconnaissance flights in support of the Western Desert campaign. Conditions were harsh and losses were heavy, as Blenheim's were vulnerable to enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire.

On 4 July 1941, while serving in the Middle East, Alan wrote to his former employer at the Alderley theatre. In the letter he enclosed a clipping he thought would be appreciated and remarked that the back of the envelope showed his "impressions of desert life". The envelope itself was decorated with hand-drawn scenes of pyramids, palm trees, and coastal landscapes, accompanied by captions such as "Eastern Breezes!" and references to the Sitra coast. This illustrated cover offers a rare, personal glimpse into the experiences and humour of a young airman far from home, and into the enduring connection he maintained with his civilian life in Brisbane.

On 19 February 1942, Sergeant Clements was serving as observer aboard Bristol Blenheim IV aircraft serial number 3872 of No. 11 Squadron. The aircraft took off from Landing Ground 116 in Egypt at 11:30 hours on an operational flight to Landing Ground 121 in the Sidi Barrani area, it failed to return. Subsequent searches located the wreck of the aircraft on 31 March 1942, approximately 68 miles west of Mersa Matruh and 1.5 miles north of the railway near Sidi Barrani. The identities of the crew were established and their remains buried locally, but after the war no trace of their graves could be found. The crew are therefore commemorated on the Alamein Memorial in Egypt.

Sergeant Herbert Alan Clements is officially recorded as having died in a flying battle in the Middle East on 19 February 1942. He is remembered on Column 266 of the Alamein Memorial, El Alamein War Cemetery, and on Panel 120 of the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.