

## **Chapter 9**

### **1945**

The Italians had capitulated to the Allies, and had the Americans advancing towards Germany from the South, after some bloody battles such as at Solerno. The Russians had held out through the winter of 1944-45 and were pushing the Germans back onto their own soil. The British and the American Landing on D-Day, the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, was pushing millions of troops towards Germany, after liberating France and Belgium. Europe was being 'bottled up' for another 5 months of fighting until Victory In Europe Day.

The Japanese were being killed where they stood, and gradually losing the islands and countries that they had conquered over the last 3 ½ years. The Philippines, Malaya, Borneo, Burma, New Guinea, The Solomons, and other island groups were all being liberated by the Allies in the Pacific and Asia.

However, the Japanese had to solve their problem of the thousands of Allied POWs being held in those same countries. They were not quite as brutal as their German counterparts' use of gas in the Concentration or Death Camps in Europe, the Japanese decide to starve and overwork their POWs to death. One such example was the Borneo Death March which commenced on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1945, as well as Burma-Thailand Railway, etc. In some cases, prisoners were being executed and buried in mass graves, but the preferred Japanese method was to march the men to death, or execute them if they fell out of line.

Of the 6 Fairfield Servicemen to die in 1945, 2 were Killed In Action (KIA), and 4 were POWs who were literally walked to death due to "Illness".

### **7<sup>th</sup> March**

Not one, but two Fairfield Servicemen died on this day, one over Europe and the other, halfway round the world, as a POW in the Borneo Death March. As no times were recorded for the death of the two, I have chosen to record the European KIA as the earlier of the two, and I apologise to family and friends if this was not the case.

William Desmond Callaghan was born in Dulwich Hill, NSW, on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1925. The son of William Callaghan of Fairfield. He enlisted in the RAAF in Sydney on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1943.

433892, Flight Sergeant W D Callaghan was posted to the 170<sup>th</sup> Squadron, RAAF. The 170<sup>th</sup> Squadron was formed on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1942 as a fighter-reconnaissance squadron equipped with North American Mustang aircraft, and from 1943 specialised in attacking and destroying railway traffic in Europe. It then operated defensive patrols against German fighter-bombers until mid January 1944, when it was disbanded due to heavy losses.

It was re-formed on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1944 at RAF Kelstern, and eventually operating from RAF Hemswell, UK. Now it was equipped with Avro Lancasters (Heavy Bombers) operating as part of the Bomber Command offensive over Germany through the winter of 1944-45. It even flew daylight sorties over Germany, as most of the German Fighters had been destroyed. It only operated as a heavy bomber unit for 6 months flying 980 sorties with a loss of 13 Lancasters, then concentrated on dropping relief supplies to the Dutch, and transporting POWs back to Britain. It flew its' last combat sortie on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1945.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> March, 433892, Flight Sergeant W D Callaghan was engaged in a "Flying Battle" with some of the few German Fighters left over The Netherlands (Holland), dropping relief supplies to the starving Dutch population. He was Killed In Action (KIA) being shot down near Reichswald Forest near the Dutch/German Border. He and his crew members were buried in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Germany in a Collective Grave at Plot 30, Row E, Grave Numbers 1-7.

433892, Flight Sergeant William Desmond Callaghan, RAAF, became the first Fairfield Serviceman to die in 1945, and the last to die in Europe during World War Two.

His medals were issued to his father, William, after the war.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 8 Row Number 4.

He is also commemorated with a small brass plaque in the Left Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 14.

77. Roll of Honour – William Desmond Callaghan, Australian War Memorial, Panel 119.

The second Fairfield Serviceman to give his life on this day was Allen Bruce Bycroft who was born at Lidcombe, NSW, on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1920, the son of Charles Bycroft of Fairfield. Allen enlisted in Merrylands on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1941.

NX30859, Private A B Bycroft was assigned to the 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and had been made a POW at Changi POW Camp on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942. He had been detached to the 2/20<sup>th</sup> Battalion at the time of his being made a POW. He had served in the CMF before the war.

He was one of 4 Fairfield Soldiers who would commence, but not complete, the infamous Japanese Borneo Death March on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1945.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> March, NX30859, Private Allen Bruce Bycroft is officially recorded as dying of "Illness" in Borneo, and is recorded on Panel 12 of the Labuan Memorial, Malaysia.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P02467.221

He became the first Fairfield Soldier to die in South East Asia in 1945, as a POW of the Japanese Borneo Death March.

His medals were issued to his father, Charles, after the war.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 7 Row Number 4.

He is also commemorated with a small brass plaque in the Right Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 12.

78. Roll of Honour, Allen Bruce Bycroft, Australian War Memorial, Panel 42.

## **1<sup>st</sup> May**

Percy Raymond Grono was born in Fairfield on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1919, to Frank and Ena Grono of 5 Barbara Street, Fairfield. He was the younger brother of Frank Walter Grono, Killed In Action (KIA) at Lae, New Guinea, on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1943.

Percy enlisted at Paddington, NSW, on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1940. NX54517, Sapper, P R Grono was attached to the 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers. He was made a Prisoner of War (POW) at the Fall of Singapore, and spent over three long years in Changi POW Camp.

He became the second Fairfield Soldier to commence the Borneo Death March on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1945, and not see the end of the road. On the 1<sup>st</sup> May, NX54517, Sapper Percy Raymond Grono is officially recorded as dying of "Illness" in Borneo, and is recorded on Panel 6 of the Labuan Memorial, Malaysia.

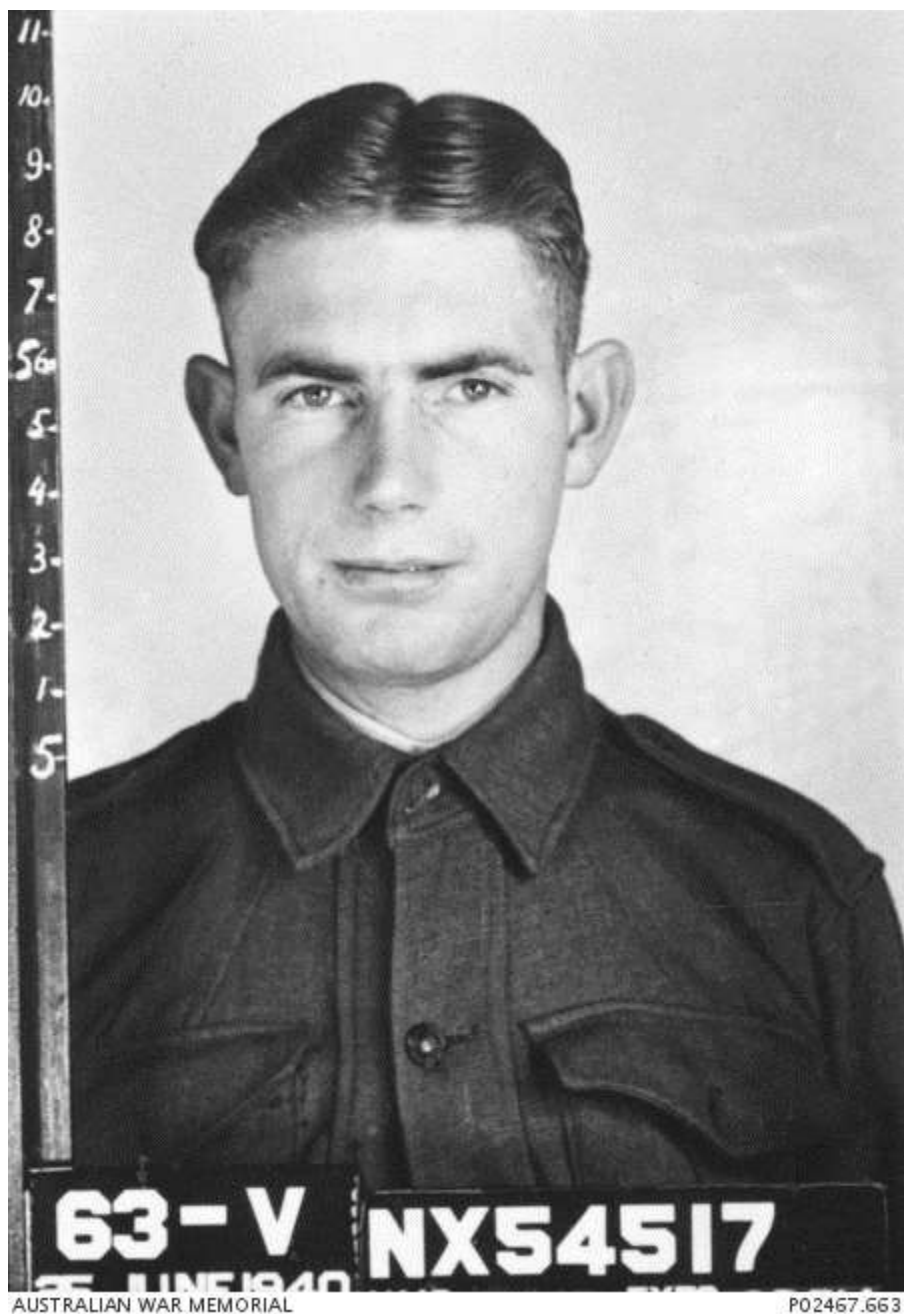
Frank and Ena Grono were the only parents in Fairfield to lose two sons to the war, one KIA and the other to die of starvation and brutality of his Japanese captors.

His medals . as were his brothers', were issued to their mother, Ena, after the war.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 5 Row Number 3.

He is also commemorated with a small brass plaque in the Right Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 4 (as his brother is in position number 4 on the Left Hand Bay).

79. Roll of Honour – Frank Raymond Grono, Australian War Memorial, Panel 23.



**28<sup>th</sup> May**

Thomas Ernest O'Donnell was born in Scone, NSW, on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1914, to Lily O'Donnell of Smithfield, NSW.

He enlisted at Paddington on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1940. NX51741, Private T E O'Donnell was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Company Australian Army Service Corps (AASC), and was made a POW at Changi POW Camp on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942.

He is the third Fairfield Soldier POW to die on the Borneo Death March. Officially, he died of "Illness" in Borneo, whilst a POW of the Japanese Imperial Army, on the 28<sup>th</sup> May.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P02467.601

He is recorded on Panel 24 of the Labuan War Memorial, Malaysia.

His medals were issued to his mother, Lily, after the war.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 7 Row Number 2.

He is also commemorated in the Left Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 1.

80. Roll of Honour - Thomas Ernest O'Donnell, Australian War Memorial, Panel 83.

## **14<sup>th</sup> June**

Clyde Alwyn Agnew was born in Cooma, NSW, on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1924. His father, Bertram John, and mother, Lillian Jane Agnew lived at 25 Coleraine Street, Fairfield, raised him as a Church of England believer.

He enlisted at Merrylands, NSW, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1942, aged 18 years 3 months. N372263, Private C A Agnew was posted to the 58<sup>th</sup>/59<sup>th</sup> Battalion (CMF).

The 58<sup>th</sup>/59<sup>th</sup> Battalion was formed on the 27th August 1942 by the amalgamation of the two previous Battalions, and was part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. About 65% of the Battalion's personnel volunteered to serve overseas, and the Unit was deployed in 1943, initially in Port Moresby, New Guinea. They were involved in the Capture of Lae and Madang, New Guinea. In November/December 1944, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was sent to Bougainville to take over from the American Garrison, with the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade (including the 58<sup>th</sup>/59<sup>th</sup> Battalion) arriving early in 1945.

The Battalion took part in the Battle of the Hongorai River which ended around mid to late June 1945, due to torrential flooding of rivers in the area. Bridges were washed away, and with no means to cross the various rivers, the Australian advance was halted for over a month. It would have been immediately before or during this Battle, that Private Agnew was killed.

His records indicate that he was Absent Without Leave (AWL) from Midnight the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1943 to 4.00 pm on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1943, and was awarded a fine of £4 (\$8 in today's money, but worth about two weeks pay in 1943). He was evacuated once for a knee injury and a bout of malaria. He was again AWL from 8.00 am on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1944 until 7.00 am on the 19<sup>th</sup> and fined another £3 (this was the more serious of the two AWL Charges, as Clyde was then in a War Zone).

On the 14<sup>th</sup> June, on Bougainville he was Killed In Action (KIA), likely during the Battle of the Hongorai River. He was originally buried in the Torokina War Cemetery, Bougainville, but later re-buried in the Bomana War Cemetery, New Guinea, in Plot E, Row C, Grave Number 14.

His medals, the 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star, War Medal, and the Australian Service Medal, were issued to his mother, Lillian, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1954. Unfortunately, Lillian passed away on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1972.

Clyde became the last Fairfield Soldier to be Killed In Action (KIA) in World War Two, aged 21 years and 3 months.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 1 Row Number 4.

He is also commemorated with a small brass plaque in the Right Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 11.

81. Roll of Honour – Clyde Alwyn Agnew, Australian War Memorial, Panel 70.

82. National Archives of Australia, AGNEW Clyde Alwyn.

## **14<sup>th</sup> July**

Keith Darcy Ferguson was born in Melbourne, Victoria, on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1918, to James Charles and Ida Ferguson of 46 Camden Street, Fairfield, NSW. He was employed as a Boat Maker before the war. On his original Attestation Form (Enlistment Form), signed at Paddington on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1940, he declared his given names as Geoffrey Charles, but obviously wanted to be known as Keith Darcy!

NX50271, Corporal KD (or GC) Ferguson was attached to the 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion. In Malaya, Keith obviously decided around the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942, that he would not just 'lay down his arms' as ordered at the Fall of Singapore, as his records indicate him as "Missing" on the 16<sup>th</sup>. However, he must have been captured by the Japanese shortly afterwards, as his records then indicate that he was then made a "Prisoner of War".

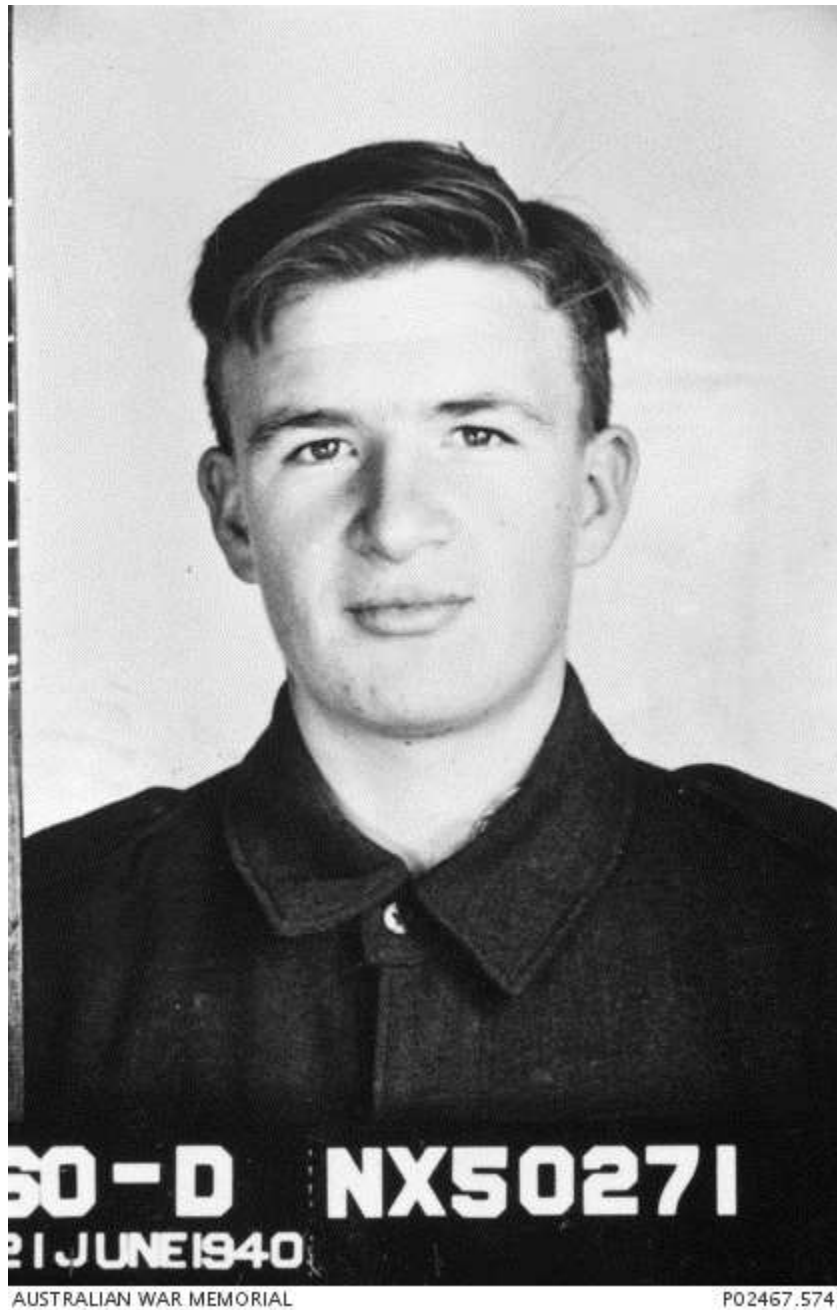
Keith became the fourth, and last, Fairfield Soldier, to commence but not complete the Borneo Death March, recorded as dying of "Illness - Borneo". His memorial is on Panel 12 of the Labuan Memorial, Malaysia.

NX50271, Private, Keith Darcy Ferguson became the last Fairfield Serviceman to die in World War Two.

His medals were issued to his father, James Charles Ferguson, after the war.

His Paver reference in Honour Avenue War Memorial, Fairfield, from the bottom left corner of the World War Two Pavers, is Column 2 Row Number 3.

He is also commemorated with a small brass plaque in the Left Hand Bay on entering the Memorial from the street, clockwise in position number 8.



- 83. Roll of Honour – Keith Darcy Ferguson, Australian War Memorial, Panel 43.
- 84. National Archives of Australia, FERGUSON, Keith Darcy.