

## Obituaries

# Dry-cleaner sank first Japanese boat of war

## OSCAR DIAMOND

**Pilot, businessman**

**Born** Brisbane, October 27, 1916

**Died** Brisbane, August 25, 2003

**W**ORLD War II fighter ace Oscar "Ossie" Diamond had planned to take part in a Remembrance Day flyover in November and it seems nothing can stand in his way.

The charismatic 86-year-old died at Greenslopes Hospital after a sudden illness. On November 11, family members hope to have his ashes scattered from the cockpit of one of his beloved Lockheed Hudson bombers as it soars over Stradbroke Island.

Son-in-law Robert Swan said the original plan was for Mr Diamond himself to ride in the Hudson, an opportunity he would have treasured.

So the family want him to keep the date, in spirit at least. The gesture would surely have tickled the fancy of an adventurer who lived and laughed at life with equal vigour.

Mr Diamond was responsible for sinking the first Japanese ship lost during World War II and became the first Australian prisoner-of-war to return home at the end of hostilities.

In between, his exploits — which included once colliding with a Japanese tank while riding a motorbike in Java — won him the Distinguished Flying Cross and provided plenty of grist for his story-telling mill.

Oscar Nathan Diamond was the only and much-loved son of Jewish migrants Rosetta and Joe Diamond.

Joe was born in Russia but fled to America in 1905, changing his name from Dashevsky to Diamond after finding work in a small store opposite the Diamond Match Factory in New York.



OSSIE Diamond . . . dry-cleaner and air warrior.

He met Rosetta — who migrated from London with her parents — while in Queensland on business.

They settled in Brisbane, with Rosetta running a millinery shop and Joe establishing Diamond Dry Cleaners in Fortitude Valley (on the site of what is now the Isis Brasserie) in 1916.

"Ossie" would be their only child — something of a rarity in an era dominated by large families.

The airman's daughter Michelle Rylance describes her father as being "the most mollycoddled little boy in New Farm".

When he came of age, the little Diamond was sent off to what was then Clayfield College but would soon become Brisbane Boys College.

He completed his senior schooling, then set about pursuing his dream career in aviation — an ambition he had nursed since visiting

Archerfield Airport as a child.

Wartime 1939 was a watershed year for the young flyer. It was the year he gained his commercial pilot's licence, met his wife-to-be Norma and enlisted in the RAAF.

Before heading off to war, he was able to make an impression on his sweetheart, taking her on a Tigermoth flight over city hall. He would joke later that she wanted to see what time it was, so he flipped the aircraft to give her a better view.

Mr Diamond enlisted in 1939 and, by 1941, was a flight lieutenant flying Hudsons with the No. 1 squadron stationed in Malaya.

On December 7 of that year, he was ordered into the air to help tackle a convoy of Japanese warships.

In a 1988 interview he said: "The moon shone through drizzle on the fleet.

I picked out the 10,000-tonner Awasaki Maru . . . and went for her at mast height."

He unloaded four 250-pound bombs, which sank the vessel and earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Gunfire from one of the other destroyers eventually knocked out one of his engines and he piloted his bomber back to the Kotabharu base on a single propeller. Several hair-raising adventures were to follow before he was shot down over Sumatra and taken as a PoW.

He was in a camp in Mukden, Manchuria when the war was won and parachutes carrying cases of Spam and Handy-Maid coffee rained down on the malnourished allied troops.

He and his comrades made their own remarkable way home with Mr Diamond leading the charge, by commandeering a Douglas DC-3 and flying to China, then India, where he was hospitalised with amoebic dysentery. When discharged, he was miffed to find someone had "pinched" the DC-3 he had "pinched" in Manchuria.

Undeterred, he wrangled a ride to Sri Lanka and booked into a luxury hotel, charging it back to the RAAF. From there, he jumped a DC-4 bound for Perth, touching down on September 4.

Fearing his post-PoW health would not be up to an aviation career, Mr Diamond returned to Brisbane to work in and eventually take over his father's dry-cleaning business.

He married Norma in 1946 and the couple had three children — Karin Swan, Michelle Rylance and David Diamond.

Both girls worked as stewards for TAA, while David is a pilot.

Mr Diamond is survived by Norma, his children, seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

— Catriona Mathewson