

Today we remember and pay tribute to Flight Lieutenant Kenneth Hanson who was killed on operations off the Netherlands East Indies during the Second World War.

Kenneth John Hanson was born in 1918 and was one of three children of Arthur and Mildred Hanson of the Sydney suburb of Killara in New South Wales. After attending Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) North Sydney where he was actively involved in cadets, Hanson spent five years working as a clerk for the Commonwealth Oil Refineries in the years before the Second World War. He was a keen photographer, a member of the Avalon Beach Surf Life Saving Club, and had earned his bronze medallion in 1936. He was also briefly involved in the Citizens Military Forces, parading part-time as a member of the 2nd Armoured Car Regiment at Ashfield.

Hanson enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force as a pilot in February 1941. After initial training at Bradfield Park, he flew Tiger Moth trainers at the elementary flight training school at Narromine before embarking for Canada for further training. Under the auspices of the Empire Air Training Scheme, Hanson flew in Avro Ansons at the flight training school at Fort Macleod in Alberta after which he went to Britain where he carried out Bean Approach Training at Rad Swanton Morley and learnt to fly Lockheed Hudson light bomber and reconnaissance aircraft at an operational training unit at RAF Silloth in Cumbria. In May 1942, he was posted to No. 500 Squadron based at RAF Stornoway in Scotland, where as part of Coastal Command, he carried out reconnaissance sorties over the Atlantic. In 1943, he was posted to India where he carried out coastal patrols in Hudsons over the Bay of Bengal with No. 353 Squadron RAF.

Hanson returned to Australia in July 1944, and after a period of leave and passing through a number of personnel depots, returned to service with the Royal Australian Air Force. He was posted to an operational training unit at Tocumwul in southern New South Wales where he learned to fly and registered hours in B-24 Liberator heavy bombers in preparation for service in the Pacific.

Hanson married Betty Cooke in Sydney in February 1945, and the following month, was posted to No. 21 Squadron RAAF then based at Fenton Airfield in the Northern Territory. Hanson was the crew captain of a number of operational flights over the Timor Sea throughout June and July, and along with his first cousin Flying Officer Jack Faviell, formed part of a detachment of aircrew and ground maintenance staff that moved to Morotai Island off Papua to strike Japanese targets throughout Indonesia in support Allied ground operations at Tarakan and Balikpapan on Borneo.

Flight Lieutenant Hanson was captain of Liberator A72-92 that failed to return from a low-level photographic reconnaissance sortie over Celebes in the Netherlands East Indies on 27 July 1945. Listed as missing, it was later determined that Hanson's aircraft had been hit by Japanese anti-aircraft fire and crashed near Tomohoan. Nine of the twelve crew members on board were killed in the crash, including Flight Lieutenant Hanson, and two of the remaining three airmen were able to parachute safely but were later captured and executed by the Japanese.

Aged 27 at the time, Hanson is buried at the Ambon War Cemetery in Indonesia. His cousin, Flying Officer Jack Faviell, was listed as missing just several days after the crash of A72-92 and his whereabouts never formally determined. As such, he was listed as killed in action and is also commemorated at Ambon War Cemetery.

Flight Lieutenant Hanson is listed on the Roll of Honour on my left, among almost 40,000 Australians who died while serving in the Second World War. His photograph is displayed beside the Pool of Reflection.

His is but one of the many stories of service and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Flight Lieutenant Kenneth Hanson, who gave his life for us, for our freedoms, and in the hope of a better world.