

ANZAC Day – Tuesday 25 April 2017



APRIL 2017

Compliments of
GREG PIPER MP
INDEPENDENT MEMBER
FOR LAKE MACQUARIE





Mighty 'Cats' farewell one of their finest

The wartime exploits of the Catalinas are extraordinary and the role Rathmines and Lake Macquarie fulfilled as the site of the largest seaplane base in the southern hemisphere during World War II is well documented.

There were 168 Catalinas used extensively in WWII by the RAAF and this magnificent flying boat is often said to be to Australia what the Spitfire was to England.

The Catalinas, their air crew and the many ground support personnel, including some 1000 women, stepped up when the enemy was at our doorstep and were vital in the fight to save Australia from invasion.

Officially, 320 lives were lost in Catalina flying operations, which included long-range bombing missions; reconnaissance patrols, mine laying as far as the Chinese coast, air-sea rescue and coast-watcher support. Catalinas were active in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the 75th anniversary of which is commemorated this year. After the war ended in 1945, Catalina crews fulfilled a delicate mission flying home the men who had suffered severely as prisoners of war.

One of the crew members flying in a Catalina between Singapore and Australia was local man, Flying Officer Gordon Wicks. Gordon was well known for his long and dedicated involvement with the Cats and the 1945 POW mission particularly touched him, describing it as a "harrowing experience" which no doubt understated the impact on him and fellow crew.

Gordon and his good friend Donald (Don) Lowe, also a Catalina crewman, featured in the very first Spirit of ANZAC publication I produced back in 2009. I was lucky enough to catch up with Gordon and Don for a picture which appears above. Sadly, Gordon passed away in October last year, aged 95. He lived a great life and served his country well.

In a fitting tribute to Gordon, Donald and all those who worked in, on or near the Catalinas, I have reproduced in this year's booklet (Page 7) an excerpt of the article that featured Gordon and Donald in that first publication.

A local community group, Rathmines Catalina Memorial Park Association Inc, has plans under way for the establishment of a memorial museum centre at the former RAAF Base which will display a PBY-5A Catalina.

ANZAC Day is the perfect chance to stop and remember all the men and women who have fought and died for Australia. Their sacrifice in many wars and conflicts has helped Australia secure its freedom so today we can live, work and play in a democratic and peaceful country.

Lest We Forget.

Greg Piper MP
Member for Lake Macquarie



COVER PICTURE: Catalinas from No.3 Operational Training Unit on a formation flying exercise over Rathmines in 1943. The unit provided the final training for crews of No.11, 20, 42 and 43 squadrons in the multiple tasks of long-range reconnaissance, supply-dropping, bombing and mine-laying.



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Rathmines chief flew with aviation pioneers



A respected airman who flew alongside two of Australia's pioneer aviators, and who also served in two world wars, has a strong link to the Catalina seaplane base at Rathmines.

Scottish-born George "Scotty" Allan (pictured left and below) was just a 17-year-old in 1917 when he joined the RAF and fought on the Western Front in the First World War.



Ten years after the war he was recruited by Charles Ulm as a pilot with Australian National Airways where he flew on the first airmail flights from Sydney to Brisbane with Charles Kingsford Smith.

In 1933 he flew with Ulm and PG Taylor on the record-breaking speed flight from England to Australia in "Faith in Australia".

During the Second World War Allan was seconded to the RAAF as a trainer and after the war was a senior executive with Qantas.

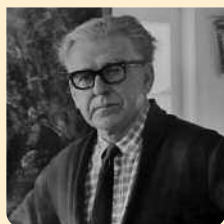
In 1941 Allan was a member of the Qantas crew which brought flying boats from San Diego to Sydney for the RAAF.

The same year he was seconded to the RAAF as Wing-Commander and was Commanding Officer of various stations including Rathmines where he trained Catalina crews.

Allan married artist Ailsa Craig in 1935. She had studied with Thea Proctor, Adelaide Perry and William Dobell. Dobell spent time at Rathmines and it was here that he possibly met George, as well as being introduced through Ailsa.



This opaque method gouache art is Dobell's portrait of "Scotty" Allan which was entered into the Archibald prize in 1941. It is considered one of Dobell's best portraits. The study is representative of Dobell's style of portraiture which is unique in being able to adapt to suit the character of his subject and reflect mood through his brushstrokes. Dobell (pictured below) died in Wangi Wangi in 1970. Allan died on 12 August 1996, aged 96.



Wartime treasure keeps Harry's memory alive

The origin and story behind this white gold signet ring with a small portrait photo of a soldier is unknown to its current keepers and may never be told.

The 8mm diameter photo is one of the smallest individual portraits in the Australian War Memorial's diverse collection.

The soldier in the picture is Boolaroo's Harold Kay. Who owned the treasured keepsake – mother, sister, girlfriend – is not known or recorded.

Harry was a plumber from Barnsley in Yorkshire, England, who made his way to Australia and was living and working in the Lake Macquarie region when The Great War started. His father Henry's address was listed as Thompson Street in Speers Point.

Harry joined the army in February 1916 and headed back overseas with the 36th Battalion. He was soon promoted to Lance Corporal.

On 12 October 1917, Harry was killed while

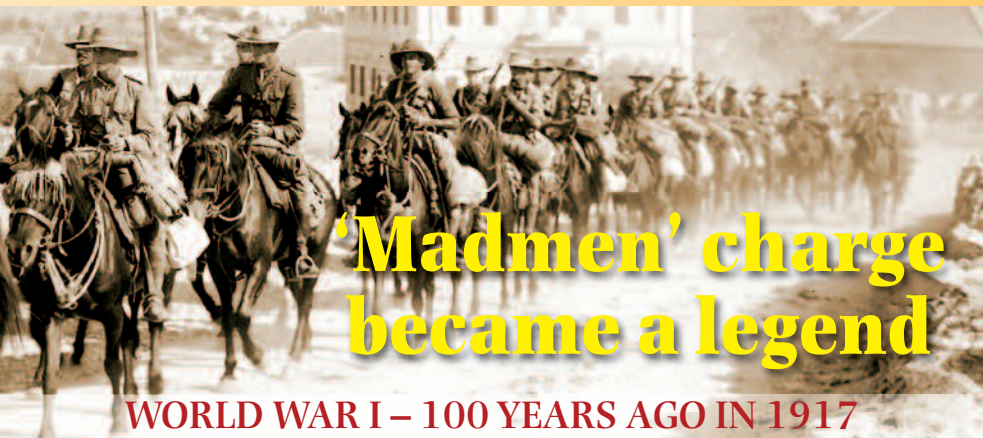


fighting on the Western Front in Belgium. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Belgium.

Interestingly, a letter from Harry's brother, Thomas, dated August 1916, enquires about the death of a Harold Kay who was listed in newspapers as being killed in action.

On this occasion, it was not "their Harry", but sadly in months to follow they would receive news of his tragic death.

Harry was aged just 21.



'Madmen' charge became a legend

WORLD WAR I – 100 YEARS AGO IN 1917

The famed Australian Light Horse 4th Brigade charged their way into Australian legend with an attack on the strategic town of Beersheba 100 years ago on 31 October 1917.

It has been recognised as the most successful charge in the history of the war, others say the greatest of all time.

A captured German officer at Beersheba later said he had heard much about the Australians' fighting qualities, but was overwhelmed to see such fury on the day of the charge: "They are not soldiers at all; they are madmen," he said.

The 800 Light Horsemen and their mounts had secured Beersheba and with it crucial water supplies. It was a turning point in the war and came against all the odds.

The famous charge at Beersheba is now legendary, and one soldier later said: "It was the horses that did it; those marvellous bloody horses. Where would we have been but for them?"

Australian casualties included 31 men killed, 46 wounded as well as 70 horses killed and more than 60 wounded.

Australians at the battle front ...

1 to 31 March, 1917. Hindenburg Line: The German army withdrew to the Hindenburg Line, a heavily fortified defence they had been preparing for some months. Australia would suffer heavy losses in months to follow.

6 April. US declares war on Germany: It is another 12 months before United States troops reach the Western Front in enough numbers to have any effect on the war.

11 April. First battle of Bullecourt: The 4th Division attacked the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt. It was poorly planned and executed. The battle cost over 3,000 casualties with 1,170 taken prisoner – the largest capture of Australian troops on the Western Front.

3-17 May. Second battle of Bullecourt: The Hindenburg Line was again attacked. Although a solid victory for the British and Australian units, the fighting cost another 7,482 casualties.

7-14 June. Battle of Messines: Nineteen mines dug beneath German lines were detonated – the largest man-made explosion in history at the time. Success came with a high price of about 13,900 casualties.

20-25 September. Battle of Menin Road: Menin Road was the opening action of the second phase of the Third Battle of Ypres, and the first time Australian troops were used in this campaign. Success cost two divisions 5,000 casualties.

26 September. Battle of Polygon Wood: The attack on Polygon Wood achieved most objectives but with 5,770 casualties.

4 October. Battle of Broodseinde: Australians captured the German positions on Broodseinde Ridge at a cost of 6,500 casualties.

12 October. Attack on Passchendaele: The last Australian attack in the Third Battle of Ypres attempted to capture the village of Passchendaele. Troops were stopped short of their objective. Battle weary Australians were soon relieved by the Canadian Corps for the winter.



Friendship survives two world wars

A friendship forged on the battlefields of two world wars was given special recognition when two Diggers reunited miles away from home.

Even the big brass band turned out to mark the unique occasion when Wilf Steers and James Edward crossed paths again during service with the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion in Palestine in the Second World War.

Both men, originally from Sydney, served with the 1st Pioneers in France in World War One.

In the 21 years between the world wars, they went their separate ways and Wilf was living in the Lake Macquarie area when he signed up for more service at the outbreak of World War Two.

Wilfred Vincent Steers worked as a machinist in Sydney and when he was just 19 he

enlisted on 6 May 1916, embarking overseas just three months later.

In January 1917, Wilf was sent to Etaples in France where the 1st Pioneer Battalion were based.

The soldiers worked through a bitter cold winter in 1917, constructing dugouts, roads and waterways.

After reporting back from leave in February 1918, Wilf was admitted to hospital with debility and evacuated to England.

He returned to France in June, but continued to be struck down by illness and returned to Australia on the 9 November 1918, two days before the Armistice.

Both Wilf and James survived the war and left the army on their return to Australia.



James Edward (left) and Wilf Steers ready for more action with the Pioneers when this picture was taken in Julis, Palestine in 1940. Both were later promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2.



BOOLAROO MAN DIES AT YPRES

Boolaroo Lance Corporal Frederick Walter Ball was a locomotive fireman with the NSW Government Railways prior to his enlistment in the army. Fred had to get his parents' permission to join up as he was under 21 years old. His father William and step-mother Annie of Creek Reserve Road, Boolaroo, gave their written consent. He served with B Company in the 30th Battalion and sailed for overseas on the HMAT *Beltana* on 9 November 1915. He was killed in action on 23 October, 1917 in Ypres, Belgium. He was 22 years old.



Fall of Singapore

The Fall of Singapore on 15 February, 1942 is one of the darkest chapters of Australian and British military history. The defence of Singapore was poorly conceived and conducted. The Japanese captured the main water supply and at 8.30pm on the 15th, more than 130,000 troops, including 15,000 Australians, surrendered to the Japanese. 1,789 Australians had been killed since the 8th Division went into Malaya in mid-January and 7,000 of those captured died as POWs.

Bombing of Darwin

The bombing of Darwin – described as “the Pearl Harbor of Australia” – was the first attack on the mainland in World War II. Japanese bombs rained down on 19 February, 1942, killing 252 Allied service personnel and civilians and wounding almost 400. Darwin was attacked twice on this day and on 3 March Broome was strafed and various other northern centres also hit. The initial raids involved more than 260 enemy aircraft. In total there were 97 air attacks on northern Australia.

Subs in Sydney Harbour

Three Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour on 31 May–1 June in 1942. The heavy American cruiser, USS *Chicago*, was anchored with other warships and were the prize targets. At about 12.30am there was an explosion on the naval depot ship HMAS *Kuttabul*. A torpedo fired at the *Chicago* missed and struck the *Kuttabul*. Nineteen Australian and two British sailors died on the ship – the only Allied deaths resulting from the attack. Two submarines were soon found however the wreckage of the third was only discovered in 2006 off Sydney’s northern beaches.

Famous Kokoda Trail

The efforts of Australian troops at Milne Bay and the Kokoda Trail saved Australia from imminent invasion. The battle along the now famous Kokoda Trail left more than 600 Australian troops dead and nearly 1700 wounded. Japanese forces landed at Gona on the north coast of Papua on 21 July, 1942, intent on crossing the Owen Stanley Range to capture the Australian base at Port Moresby. It was on the Kokoda Trail that the Papuan people – the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels – played a crucial role in helping the Australians.

The battle for the Kokoda Trail was finally won by Australia in mid-November 1942.

Stopping The Desert Fox

El Alamein was one of the most significant battles for Australian soldiers in World War II – stopping “The Desert Fox” Erwin Rommel’s push in North Africa. The First Battle of El Alamein was fought from 1–27 July, 1942, and stopped the advance made by the Axis (Germany and Italy) into Egypt with the supply-rich Suez Canal and Middle Eastern oilfields its key objectives. Three major battles occurred around El Alamein between July and November 1942 and were the turning point of the war in North Africa. It marked the end of Axis expansion in Africa.



**WORLD WAR II – 75
YEARS AGO IN 1942**



A Kokoda Trail hero

Bruce Kingsbury was an Australian soldier with the 2/14th Battalion who served in WWII in the Middle East and later gained fame for his actions during the Battle of Isurava in the Kokoda Trail campaign in New Guinea. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his brave actions on 29 August 1942, the day he was killed by a sniper while charging enemy lines. He was the first serviceman to receive the VC for actions on Australian territory.



Killed at El Alamein

Private Albert Victor Tytherleigh, of Cardiff, served with the 2/13 Battalion in WWII. He enlisted in September 1941 and served in the Middle East. Albert was killed in action at El Alamein, Egypt, on 29 October 1942, aged 22 years.



Hero pilot's sacrifice to save stricken crew

A fatal mission for one hero pilot just four days before Christmas in 1943 left a local family searching for answers which finally came years later and after the war.



RAAF Flight Sergeant Patrick John Edwards (pictured), of Cardiff, was piloting one of 16 Halifax aircraft which took off from RAF Leconfield on the evening of 20 December 1943 to raid Frankfurt in Germany.

Two of 466 Squadron's planes never returned, including HX273 being flown by Patrick.

It was later established the aircraft had crashed. The pilot was killed having stayed at the controls after the crew escaped the doomed plane. They were all later taken Prisoners of War.

Therefore it was not until after the war when the captured airmen returned home that they could reveal details of that night.

In a 1945 statement one of the crew, Flt Sgt Ralph Spencer Parsons, reported: "A night fighter attacked after we bombed the target, setting the inner engine and wing on fire. The Captain ordered bail out after an unsuccessful attempt to extinguish the fire. All the crew were uninjured and acknowledged. I bailed out first at 12,000 feet with the aircraft diving steeply and out of control. I estimate the aircraft crashed approx. 20-30 miles north east of Frankfurt. Five others bailed out okay. I presume the Pilot was still in the plane when it crashed."

Another crew member, Beamish Brett, reported that at about 2000 feet when he bailed out, with the starboard wing on fire and the plane in a steep dive, there was no sign of the pilot leaving the plane which crashed near the village of Belterhausen.

Flt Sgt Patrick Edwards is buried in the Hannover War Cemetery, Germany.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Gordon Wicks and Donald Lowe which appeared in Lake Macquarie Electorate's 2009 Spirit of ANZAC publication. It is reproduced here as a tribute to both men, and all others, who flew in the Catalinas in WWII.

Flying mates with a great story to tell

WHEN old Aussie war-time mates get together they could be forgiven if their stories from yesteryear, like good fishing yarns, had become bigger and better through the passing of the years.

But for former Royal Australian Air Force Flight Sergeant Donald Lowe and Flying Officer Gordon Milne Wicks, there is no need to tell tall tales. Their stories are very real.

They served during those dark, desperate days, when Australia's defence was under threat and their close bond has developed and strengthened since their days at Rathmines.

Flying Officer Wicks flew dangerous missions and was lucky to have made it through World War II. Enlisting with the RAAF at age 20, Gordon served in a number of posts and at the end of February 1943 was posted to Rathmines to train on Catalinas.

Gordon was then posted to Cairns with the No. 20 Squadron operating through Port Moresby and Milne Bay.

Later the crew was sent to Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria and flew long ocean patrols, convoy escort duty, bombing and mine-laying and occasionally taking "Z Force" Commandos behind enemy lines or withdrawing them when necessary.

At war's end in 1945 Flying Officer Wicks helped fly Prisoners of War home ... a job he recalls as being "a harrowing experience".

Don signed on with the RAAF in 1944. He did his air gunner's training and became a member of a Catalina crew, beginning a lifelong association with the plane.



FRIENDS FOREVER: Gordon Wicks (left) and Donald Lowe reminisce about old times at the RAAF Base Rathmines.



THE SPIRIT OF ANZAC

'Fab Four' nurses arrive in Vietnam

The first Australian servicewomen deployed to Vietnam arrived in the war-torn country in May 1967 – 50 years ago next month.

The "Fab Four" nurses, as they became known, served with the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps and were posted to the 8th Field Ambulance.

They were Captain Amy Pittendreich (WA), Lieutenant Colleen Mealy (SA), Lt Terri Roche (NSW) and Lt Margaret Ahern (NSW).

Forty-three nurses served between 1966 and 1972 as part of the Australian Army's involvement in Vietnam. Service nurses were also involved in the evacuation of casualties back to Australia. About 210 Australian women civilian nurses were involved in volunteer medical teams.



The Fab Four nurses (from left) Lieutenant Colleen Mealy, Lt Margaret Ahern, Captain Amy Pittendreich and Lt Terri Roche, ready for duty.

More than 50,000 Australian service personnel served in Vietnam with 520 dying while on service. One of those was Australian nurse, Temporary Captain Barbara Black, who died of illness aged 25.

2017 ANZAC Day activities in the region

BOOLAROO-SPEERS POINT

- 5.15am: Assemble cnr Main Rd and Park St for march to Speers Point Cenotaph from 5.35am.
- 6.00am: Dawn Service at Speers Point Cenotaph.

CARDIFF

- 5.00am: Dawn Service at Cardiff RSL, 45 Macquaire Rd. March from corner Main Rd and Macquarie Rd to Cardiff RSL for the Service.

DOYALSON-WYEE RSL

- 5.00am: Dawn Service at the Doyalson-Wyee Sub-Branch Memorial. Breakfast afterwards at the RSL Club.
- 8.30am: March from Raw Challenge Course, south along Pacific Hwy, turn left into Wentworth Ave, then left into the RSL grounds and proceed to the Sub-Branch Cenotaph for Service.

MORISSET

- 6.00am: Dawn Service at the Morisset Country Club. Breakfast afterwards in the club.
- 10.00am: March from the railway station car park to the Morisset Country Club. Form up at 9.40am.
- 10.40am (approx): ANZAC Service at the Country Club.

RATHMINES

- 12 Noon: ANZAC Day Remembrance Service at the flying boat Memorial on the point overlooking Catalina Bay, adjacent to the Rathmines Memorial Bowling Club. March from 11.30am.

RYHOPE

- 9.00am: ANZAC Service at Lake Macquarie Memorial Park, Ryhope.

TERALBA

- 7.40am: Assemble in ANZAC Parade for march to the War Memorial.
- 8.00am: Service at the Teralba War Memorial in ANZAC Park.

TORONTO

- 5.00am: Dawn Service at the War Memorial in Goffet Park. Breakfast available afterwards for gold coin donation.
- 10.45am: Form up at Diggers Club for march to the War Memorial in Goffet Park. Step off 11.10am.
- 11.30am: ANZAC Service at the War Memorial in Goffet Park.

WANGI WANGI

- 5.30am: Dawn Service at the War Memorial at Wangi Wangi RSL Club.
- 10.00am: March steps off in Puna Rd for the War Memorial. Assemble and form up at 9.30am. ANZAC Service at the Memorial to follow march.