

148 KYLE PDE

KYLE BAY 2221

Australia Day

Dear Roland Orchard

As a follow up to
your article on John (Joel)
Thompson, may I submit,
my memories of him,
as my skipper from
November 1944 until
June 1945

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(1)

I first met up with Jack Thompson, at En Shemar, when posted there (from Jerusalem) to complete an OTU course on Wellingtons.

You are no doubt aware that, to simplify matters, if 3 Wags could approach a pilot's name on a Postings Board, and be accepted by him, the crew was usually, easily complete.

The Wags (Jeff Fenwick, Frank Hickey and myself) had the choice of two skippers and when we approached Jack, he said "yes". It was a most fortunate choice for us, as you will later read. The other skipper was also an Aussie.

(5)

John had been a second pilot with 458, in Italy, so this would be his first command. Whilst we Wags trained on Ansons on wheels etc, John was doing circuits and bumps on Wellingtons.

When we finally got together, as a crew, we did many day and night flights concentrating on the use of Leigh Light and Radar.

The 3 Wags shared radar, wireless and near turret duties.

It was on one such night exercise when 4 Wellingtons were flying off C-in-C Stamer that tragedy struck. Using Leigh Light technique meant using the

③
light, lowered from the
Bomb Bay, and flying low
to identify targets -
dangerous work.

One Wellington, skippered
by the other Australian Pilot
we could have chosen, instead
of Joe, crashed into the
ocean with no survivors
of the Australian crew. Of
the other 3 Wellingtons, 1
had returned with engine
trouble and the other 3
were given BBA's (return
to base).

We completed our training.
Deciding on a short
holiday before our posting
to the Squadron, we
decided on a skiing holiday
in Lebanon alongside

(4)

French Alpine Troops.

A great holiday but we got snowed in in our Chalet, had to walk 5 km's down the slopes to a village to connect with a bus to Beirut. The Squadron sent up Cinson's to return us to base.

Condensing the rest of our trip to join the Squadron, in Italy, we caught an Italian ship, the Almagar from Egypt, landed at Toronto in Italy to learn that USS had been located at Gibraltar on reduced strength.

After 3 weeks in Toronto we boarded an Canadian Assault Ship "The Prince Henry" for Wallis - a week there

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then the Canadians dropped
us off at Gibraltar.

3rd March 1945.

So it had taken me
over 2 years from enlistment
in November 1942 to become
a squadron member.

Training exercises followed
routes to Morocco, Algeria
etc and finally intercepting
the German Sub U541 off
Cape St Vincent in the
Atlantic and shadowing
it into Gibr. We shared
this task with Ralph
Bailey's crew.

The war in Europe was
over.

458 Squadron was directed
to land at Cornwall then to
Anglesey, in Wales, when the

Squadron was disbanded
so we said goodbye to
our trusty "D" for Doc.

Thus ended my service
under the dependable
skipper John Thompson. A
young handsome man of
honour, courage, approachable
but above all, a leader.

His family are, to be sure,
rightly proud of his record.

I know we 3 Wags were.