AWM 65

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BYRNE, A.K.J.
404003

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AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
AWM2019.8.1448

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, London.

SURNAME ..... BYRNE ..... NUMBER 404003

CHRISTIAN NAMES ..... A. K. J.

AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING .. F/LT.

DEGREES ETC. .....

DATE OF BIRTH ..... PLACE .....

EDUCATED .....

DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE .....

PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE .....

PLACES OF TRAINING .....

CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES .....

.....

SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED) CLUBS ETC. .....

.....

FATHER .....

WIFE .....

HOME ADDRESS ..... BRISBANE .....

SIGNATURE .....

DATE .....

DATE OF EMBARKATION .....

HEADQUARTERS USE ONLY - DO NOT FILL IN

AWARDS .....

CATEGORY ..... INTERVIEWS .....

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RADIO ..... OTHER REFERENCES .....

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Personal file - F/Lt. A.K.J. Byrne

FROM MIDDLE EAST: 22/9/44

Italy September 17th. Carrying highly inflamable cargo - possibly petrol in drums and ammunition - a 2,000 ton motor vessel which was creeping down the Italian Adriatic coast bound apparently for a port in the vicinity of Rimini was sunk by an aircraft of an Australian Wellington squadron early Thursday morning. The Wellington which was captained by 416363 W/O M.R.Priest of Stirling West, South. Australia, was on anti-shipping patrol of the upper part of the Western Adriatic Coast when at one point it made contact with a scattered south bound convoy consisting of three motor vessels and a similar number of escort craft. Singling out one cargo ship the Wimpy shadowed it for an hour and a quarter by which time it was between 5 and 6 miles off the coast opposite Ravenna. At that point Priest decided to make the attack. Flares were dropped illuminating the vessel clearly and a stick of bombs was sent down straddling the target. For a while nothing happened then the rear gunner saw a red glow near one of the guns which was firing at the Wellington from the ship. When the glow appeared the gun immediately ceased fire. After circling the ship for a while without seeing further evidence of damage, the Wimpy resumed patrol. It had reached the northern extremity of its patrol area when looking back, the crew saw a vivid flash of a huge explosion followed by a tongue of flame lighting up the sky. As the aircraft turned and flew southward approaching the ship the fire grew in intensity and when the Wimpy reached the scene of attack, the vessel was a mass of flames from stem to stern with thick pall of smoke rising 5,000 ft above it. At intervals there were fresh explosions which belched out more flame and smoke s When the Wellington returned to base, the crew learned that another aircraft to the same squadron which was over the motor vessel when it first blew up was tossed into the air with an involuntary gain of height at a rate of 3,000 ft per minute. Further confirmation of the sinking of the ship came from the Navy later that morning. In addition to Priest, those who took part in this most successful attack were 428782 F/S P.W.Pettitt Second pilot of Mosman, N.S.W., 413705 F/O F.P.Wright, navigator of Narrabeen, N.S.W., 412696 W/O L.M.Richards, Wop/Ag of Lismore, N.S.W., 420113 W/O E.J.Baker, Wop/Ag of Wentworthville, N.S.W.

Sgt.

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Sgt. W.H.Markland A.G. of Preston Lancashire, England. Markland was not normally in Priest's crew; he was standing in for 404003 F/Lt. A.K.J. Byrne of Brisbane who was recovering from an attack of Malaria. The crew has been flying together a fortnight short of twelve months and has only 37 hours operational flying left to complete its present tour.

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Bio. File.

Supplied by F/Lt W Robertson (Italy) under letter 21 8/2/AIR of 24 Feb

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100,000 MILES AS AIR GUNNER

After flying 100,000 miles in air operations as a gunner in a space of almost four years, F/Lt A.K.J. Byrne. Aus 404003, of Brisbane, is on his way back to Australia.

Byrne enlisted in the RAAF on April 16,1940 and after training in Australia, arrived in the Middle East March 1941. After completing his OTU in Egypt, Byrne was posted to a RAF Maryland Squadron flying photo, recce over the Western Desert and harbours as a member of Sgt (later S/Ldr) Dick Welshman's crew. Welshman was killed in operations.

The squadron then moved back to Wadi Matruh to reequip with Beauforts. The C.O, at that time was a Tasmanian, W/Cdr A. Bowman. Then the squadron moved to Mariut aerodrome and engaged on coastal recce and recce over Crete and Greece.

Next move was to Amiriya, where the squadron converted to torps, losing five of six kites in the first strike against a German convoy which was strongly defended by Me110s and JU88s.. When Rommel started his push, the squadron was sent to Gianaclis to stand by. It then went to Shandur for training.

Byrne left the squadron in Sept. 1942 and became wing gunnery leader and then group gunnery leader. While at Shalufur on this job, he did three sorties in Liberators, attacking two convoys.

In June 1943, Byrne was posted to an Australian Baltimore squadron employed on GR work from a Western Desert base. After three months there he was posted to a training school where he crewed up with P/O M. Priest as pilot and went to another RAAF squadron - one flying Wellingtons on armed sea recce, anti-sub and anti-shipping work. From their Bone base, the squadron moved to Corsica and Sardinia, making sweeps along the Ligurian Sea coasts.. Later, they moved to Italy.

While he was in hospital with a bout of malaria, Byrne's crew attacked and sank a 2000-ton tanker in the Adriatic. "It was the only bit of excitement we had, had, and I had to miss it" he said unhappily.

During the South of France "do" Byrne's crew flew on naval co-operation for the US Navy, but returned to headquarters in Italy after 14 days. Byrne became TE in January this year.

S/Ldr.
(S.K.S.Summers) SPRO
RAAF PRO MAAF.

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