

# *“Come on Wesley”*

Wesley College and Old Wesley  
Collegians in World War II



By Philip J Powell



# *“Come on Wesley”*

Wesley College and  
Old Wesley Collegians  
in World War II

By Philip J Powell

### **Other books by the author on former Wesley College students:**

“Come on Lads” Old Wesley Collegians and the Gallipoli Campaign, 2015

“Come on Lads” Old Wesley Collegians in World War I, 2019

Captain Robert Cuthbert Grieve VC, 2018

The Memorials and Graves of Old Wesley Collegians who died in World War I, 2021

Copyright © 2025 Philip J. Powell. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-7641612-0-6 (Book)

ISBN: 978-1-7641612-1-3 (eBook)

The author has made every effort to contact copyright holders for material used in this book. Any person or organisation that may have been overlooked should contact the author at: [pjphistory@gmail.com](mailto:pjphistory@gmail.com)

Design by George Petrou Design Pty Ltd

---

**Front Cover:** These marble lions at Wesley College’s St Kilda Road campus, were dedicated in May 1916 to recognise the service and sacrifice of former students during WWI. They now stand to recognise the military service of all former students.

*The Second World War was the bloodiest and most destructive conflict in human history.*

*At least 70 million people died.*

*The consequences of the conflict, such as the Cold War and de-colonisation of Asia and Africa, were felt for decades.*

*Little wonder then that the war has been celebrated, studied, imagined and continually re-interpreted ever since 1945.*

*The Second World War was the conflict that most shaped Australia during the 20th century.*

*It was the country's largest ever conflict and one of the most significant.*

*Nearly a million Australians...served in the armed forces during the war.*

*More than 30,000 Australians became prisoners of war (8,500 prisoners of the Germans and Italians; 22,000 prisoners of the Japanese), and some 40,000 died while serving in the Army, the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal Australian Navy and the Merchant Navy.*

Dr Karl James  
Head of Military History, AWM  
Wartime issue 99 Winter 2022

*This is the story of one Australian school's involvement in this conflict - its staff, students, and, most significantly, over 1,800 of its alumni.*

# From the August 1945 *Chronicle*<sup>1</sup>

## WHEN THE BOMBERS CAME OVER

*Japanese planes were approaching in two groups but were still 30 miles out to sea. Our fighters were just roaring out to meet them.*

*In the Fighter Control room—part of a former overseer's home in a coconut plantation—the markers on the huge control map showed the progress of the incoming raiders. As radar reports gave their bearings the markers were moved, first one leading then the other, the lead changing with every report.*

*There were six of us close by the table—AIF, RAAF and RAN Intelligence officers—watching in a silence when something prompted me to break, “Come on, Wesley,” I said, as the markers were switched and the lead changed again. “Wesley! Wesley be bothered. Scotch!” a Navy man replied.*

*“Wesley? Scotch? No. Geelong College!” someone else added. The others looked up and we laughingly compared notes. Every Victorian public school was represented among the six of us.*

*It was difficult after that to concentrate on those markers. There was talk of matches and boat races—“D’you remember Rhoden and Fatty Austin and the year Fatty sprained his ankle against Wesley?”—d’you remember this? d’you remember that?*

*Later, when the raid was over and our planes were down again, I pulled a sweat marked Wesley “Chronicle” from the hip pocket of my jungle greens and we pored over its sporting pages and talked on for hours, and the “Chronicle” was not in my pocket when we broke up. The Xavier chap had it and before I saw it again each of the others had read it from cover to cover.*

*That chance remark “Come on Wesley,” and that Chronicle made the six of us something more than mere service acquaintances, for we got together in twos and threes many times after that and yarned about the old days again.*

*That is the story of ONE Chronicle and the pleasure it gave in the unpleasantness of an operational station up north.*

---

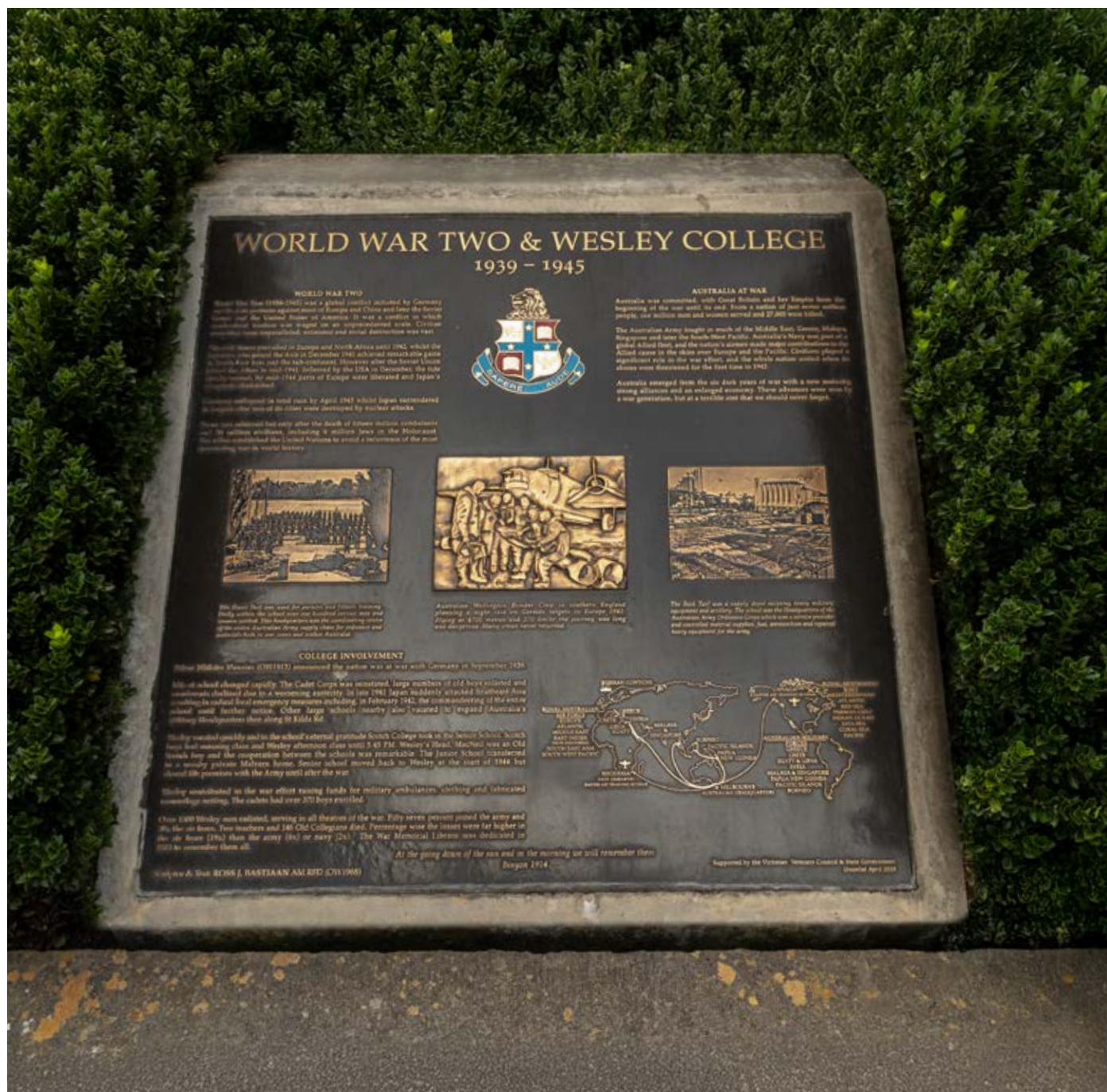
<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the *Chronicle* does not reveal the identity of the OW who provided this story other than advising he was an “intelligence officer.”



# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction - <i>The Greatest Generation</i></b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Some technical matters</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1939</b>	<b>12</b>
A look back two decades	12
3 September 1939 – Declaration of War	15
The School	15
Military service	15
<b>1940</b>	<b>20</b>
The School	20
Australia	24
Navy	26
Army	27
Airforce	30
France	32
England	33
<b>1941</b>	<b>34</b>
The School	34
Australia	37
Airforce – Australia	40
Airforce – Overseas	42
Europe	46
North Africa	46
Greece	53
Crete	57
Syria	60
Navy	64
South Africa	67
Far East	67
<b>1942</b>	<b>68</b>
The School	68
Malaya/Singapore	71
Java	77
Rabaul	78
Ambon	80
Timor	81
Timor Sea	81
India/Burma	82
Main PNG island	82
Middle East	89
Europe	93
Navy	95
Australia	96

<b>1943</b>	<b>102</b>
The School	102
Australia	103
Airforce - Australia	105
Navy	108
Europe	109
Far East/SWPA	114
Salamaua/Wau/Lae/etc	118
PoW/civilians	121
Middle East	122
<b>1944</b>	<b>124</b>
The School	124
Australia	125
Navy	128
Europe	133
Far East/SWPA	144
<b>1945</b>	<b>150</b>
The School	150
Australia	150
Navy	155
Europe	158
Airforce - SWPA	161
PNG – General	162
Philippines	164
Aitape - Wewak	165
Bougainville	166
New Britain/Rabaul	167
Morotai/Borneo	168
Japanese surrender	169
PoWs	170
Other returnees/local	171
<b>1946 and beyond</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Cato College</b>	<b>184</b>
Roll of Honour	188
Enlistments	194
Honours issued related to WWII service	204
Senior leadership positions during WWII	206
Significant post 1945 service	208
Unfavourable comments in files	212
Summary of aeroplane types	213
References	214
Key to abbreviations	217
Australian military ranks	219
Index	220



Above: The Ross Bastiaan (OW1968) WWII plaque at Wesley College



# Foreword

I am delighted to write the foreword to this, the latest contribution to the history of Wesley College, by the indefatigable Philip Powell.

The month of May 2025, as this is written, marked the 80th anniversary of VE Day. It went rather unremarked and unnoticed. The end of the Second World War in Europe was an epoch-making event. It was only 23 years before I was born but now feels a very long time ago. The generation who fought the war are now numbered in the tens rather than the tens of thousands. The living witnesses, those who comprised the Greatest Generation, are being winnowed away by the inevitable ravages of time.

This timely book is a reminder, and a record, of Wesley College, and Cato College's greatest generation.

This generation went to war knowing what was in store. They went to war understanding the sacrifice that may be asked. They went to war in order to create a world in which freedom of thought and expression and association was protected. They went to war in order to resist savage military expansion and to defeat tyranny.

As time passes, and the generation that fought and experienced the war recede from living memory, it behoves us to think of them not as sepia figures in photographs but as living, thinking, individuals, with hopes, dreams and loves. All put on hold because of the most terrible war in history.

This book does so. It tells us the individual stories of the men and women who served. Some of them are astonishing. Some of them are unexpected. All help to remind us of a time when history was created by ordinary people.

I commend it to you.

**Nick Evans** (OW1985)  
Principal  
Wesley College Melbourne



# Introduction - *The Greatest Generation*

In his book “*The Greatest Generation*,” Tom Brokaw profiled men and women who grew up in the United States during the Great Depression and then went on to fight and win World War Two (WWII). Brokaw stated that those who suffered, sacrificed, and persevered during that period are unquestionably America’s Greatest Generation.

In the author’s view, that same title can apply equally to the Australians of that same era.

---

In September 1939, with the invasion of Poland, WWII began. Australians enlisted to join the fight against Nazi Germany and its allies.

At that time, Wesley College, a Melbourne Methodist boys’ school, had been operating for over 70 years. During that time, about 8,900 boys attended Wesley.<sup>1</sup> More than 1,800 Old Wesley Collegians (OWs) would join the Australian, British and New Zealand military services during WWII. One hundred and fifty-two of them would die because of service, and many others would be permanently injured and mentally affected.

Many WWII OWs had fathers and uncles who had served in World War One (WWI). Indeed, with only 20 years between the end of WWI and WWII, several WWI OWs also served in WWII, even if it was in the local part-time militia service.

In WWI, many former students wrote to Wesley’s Headmaster and the Old Wesley Collegians Association’s (OWCA) Honorary Secretary about their military service experiences. Some of their letters were published, in whole or in part, in the school’s tri-annual magazine, the Wesley College Chronicle (*Chronicle*), in a section called “The Old Brigade.” Obituaries for some of the fallen were also included.

This tradition continued in WWII, but for various reasons, the quantity and quality of material in the *Chronicle* were less than in WWI. As for WWI, some of the content of “The Old Brigade” came from newspaper

reports, especially if an OW had been awarded an honour or involved in an action reported in local newspapers.

The *Chronicle*, along with references in *Wesley College—The First Hundred Years* (1965) and Andrew Lemon’s *A Great Australian School—Wesley College examined*, contain the primary record of former students’ and teachers’ WWII service. However, these histories focus on the physical relocation of the school following the Army’s requisition of the St Kilda Road premises from early 1942 through to 1945.

This book aims to provide a more comprehensive history of the service of OWs and related events at the school.

The *Chronicle* is the key document on which this book is constructed. It provides a direct voice from these years and helps identify the relationship between OWs as they progressed in their military service. Mainly, in the early years, there is a sense, as they write and thank the OWCA for copies of the *Chronicle*, that they realise they are in the same position as the OWs who served in WWI.

This book also documents the circumstances of the deaths of those listed on the School’s Roll of Honour.

It was not intended to record the service details of every OW recognised with military service. The initial group has been drawn from those mentioned in the *Chronicle*, supplemented by other names that have come to

---

<sup>1</sup> Per the College’s Entry Book 8,894 students had attended, or were still attending, Wesley by the end of 1939.

attention in the research process. It is estimated that forty percent of the total enlistments have an entry in the text of this book.

As for WWI, the extent of the service by OWs was very wide. One or more OW seems to have been involved in the actions of the Australian military during WWII. However, WWII was different from WWI. It was a global conflict not restricted primarily to Europe, the North Sea, and the Middle East. While the Australian army played a crucial role in certain battles, it was not actively involved in the European theatre, apart from the failed Greece/Crete campaigns. Whilst it played an active role in the Pacific, once the 1942 and 1943 Papua and New Guinea (PNG) campaigns were complete, it took a secondary role to that played by the Americans in rolling back the Japanese forces. There was, however, a significant role for Australians in air warfare and a greater role, compared to WWI, was played by the navy, albeit in ships of more modest means than that of the major players. Finally, while some Australians had been Prisoners of War (PoWs) in WWI, that number was dwarfed by the numbers of Australians captured in Europe, North Africa, Greece, Crete and the thousands captured by the Japanese in early 1942. At least 60 OWs were PoWs.

During WWII, Wesley was an all-boys school. Co-education did not commence until the late 1970s. In the late 1980s, Cato College, an all-girls school, became part of Wesley. It is appropriate that this book includes the service of its former students. Their story and service have been documented in a separate chapter.

While the text in this document might sometimes imply otherwise, the author is acutely aware that there is no claim that the heroic or any other attributes of the OWs are solely a result of their time at Wesley. While some attended Wesley for all of their primary and secondary

education, many only had short periods at the School. The text does not, in particular, distinguish OWs length of time at the School.

My thanks to Rachel Webster, President of the Wesley College Council, Nick Evans (OW1985) Principal, Kate Evans (OW1998) and the members of the archives and alumni sections for their support and assistance. In particular, the help of Margot Vaughan, Kenneth Park, and Ian Thomas (OW1982) has been greatly appreciated. Also, Rodney Thorpe (OW1973), who accompanied me on visits to the battlefields and cemeteries of England, Europe, the Middle East and PNG; Leigh Treyvaud (OW1963); and Colin Macdonald, who assisted with research.

Finally, thanks to my wife, Glennys. Her encouragement and support have been fundamental to writing this book. It would not have been possible without her.

**Philip J Powell (OW1973)**

# Some technical matters

The Australian WWII military was a complicated organisation subject to numerous changes during the war period.<sup>1</sup> This book is not the place to try and explain that. However, it is worth noting that at the commencement of the war, the Government created a volunteer force for the army called the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF), as the existing militia units were restricted to service in the Australian states and territories only. Again, this is a complicated story, but it is evidenced in the service numbers provided; AIF enlistments have an 'X' in them, whereas the militia does not. It is possible that a service person would have a militia number that was replaced if that person moved to the AIF, the Royal Australian Airforce (RAAF) or the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).<sup>2</sup>

Units of the Second AIF have the term "2/" in front of the unit number to distinguish it from a First AIF unit (from WWI) with the same number. Also, if a "2/" is not in front of the unit number, it was a militia unit.

In WWII, RAAF enlistments usually had a six-digit number from 400001 to 459999 for aircrew and 1 to 299999 for ground crew. The RAN enlistments had a prefix with the initials of the port they enlisted at, for example, PM means Port Melbourne.

Some men, mainly those enlisted immediately as commissioned officers, do not have a service number.

The basic unit in the airforce is the squadron. However, many Australians were allocated to a United Kingdom Royal Airforce Force (RAF) squadron rather than an Australian RAAF squadron. In these cases, the letters RAF appear the first time the squadron is mentioned in respect of any person.

A glossary of frequently used abbreviations is at the rear of the book. Also provided is a table that lays out the various ranks in the hierarchy for the three services. Appointment to a rank was often "temporary" with either a subsequent reversion to the prior rank or, more typically, a formal appointment/confirmation to the new rank level. In most cases, the text does not distinguish a temporary appointment that was subsequently formalised/confirmed.

Many OWs served in Headquarters (HQ) sections in staff roles. These are the roles that enable operational fighting units to operate in accordance with the orders

from the army leadership. HQ staff was split into 3 branches:

- General "G" branch: responsible for operations, intelligence and training
- Administration "A" branch: responsible for personnel management
- Quartermaster "Q" branch: responsible for logistic and equipment support.

A General Staff Officer (GSO) was graded as I, II or III. There were titles such as Directors (D) and Deputy Assistants (DA).

There are occasional inconsistencies in the spelling of names from the Wesley and military records; for example, is the correct spelling *Philip* or *Phillip*? I have attempted to use the spelling that seems supported by the original documents completed by the individual, but I apologise if errors have been made.

Service records never tell the whole story of a person's experience. They can also, at times, be difficult to read and interpret. While care has been taken, there may be an error in the interpretation of the record and, therefore, in the summary of service.

To avoid too much detail in the text, the details of the initial training units of each OW have generally not been provided. On enlisting in any of the services, each person would have been subject to attendance at a basic camp and then, most likely, one or two advanced training courses. Also, militia service (both pre and post-September 1939) followed by AIF/RAAF/RAN service has usually not been detailed in the text. In the main, after initial training, militia servicemen were sent to Australian coastal areas to prepare defences – this took on a greater urgency from December 1941 with the Japanese entry into the war.

For those in the RAAF, the details of their training and voyages to Canada or Africa for further training before going to operations in the UK and elsewhere are not detailed. When arriving in the UK, they rarely went straight into action. For most, it was another three to six months of training on aircraft and equipment before being posted to an operational squadron.

Many of the OWs who joined the RAN did so as

<sup>1</sup> As an example, during WWII the Australian Army fielded 13 senior headquarters and these had 34 different titles. Source: *The Unit Guide the Australia Army 1939-1945*, p2.010.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/numbers/army>.



Midshipmen and, after attending a training course, were promoted to the rank of Sub-Lieutenant.

Many men had periods of hospitalisation and/or leave. Unless it was significant, details have been excluded.

On completion of service, for those who survived, there is a range of inter-changeable terms such as “demobilised” or “terminated.” Many commissioned officers were put on a Reserved List. The text simply notes the end of WWII service. Some remained in the military forces. Significant post-1945 service has been recorded.

All direct copy from documents is printed in *italics*. Unless noted, the direct copy comes from an issue of the *Chronicle*. Editing has occurred to ensure consistency of style and presentation. In a few cases, non-italicised information has been inserted in brackets in the direct copy to assist the reader. Also inserted, when first mentioned, is each person’s unique service number to assist in the proper identification of that person with his or her service.<sup>3</sup>

There is a wide range of abbreviating military titles. For example, a Flight Officer could also be written as Flt Off, F-O or F/O. In copy that quotes from a source, the abbreviation used in the source material has been maintained. In the text written by the author, there has been an attempt to be consistent if abbreviations are used.

If family members want to access detailed service information, they can do so via the National Archives Australia (NAA). By the time this book is published most of the WWII service files should be digitally available from the NAA’s website. The service numbers provided in the text should ensure access to the person’s file. The author is happy to assist in this process. Please contact him at [pjphistory@gmail.com](mailto:pjphistory@gmail.com).

When an OW is first mentioned, the year he began at Wesley College is indicated. This is different to the current practice of using the year the person last attended the school and having the initials OW in front of the year.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of WWII, what is now Papua New Guinea (PNG) was two separate territories. The southern part of the eastern half of the New Guinea

island was called Papua and was under Australian administration since 1906. The northern area above Papua and several islands, including Bougainville and New Britain, were formerly German New Guinea, which, under a 1919 League of Nations Mandate, was administered by Australia, albeit separately from Papua. After WWII, the two territories were combined as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. This became an independent country in 1975. While the army widely used the abbreviation “NG” in many of its unit terms (such as describing the HQ group for both Papua and New Guinea as *NG Force*), in this book, the term PNG is used to denote the area we know.

It is also worth recalling that the western half of New Guinea Island was under Dutch/The Netherlands control as part of the Dutch East Indies colonies. Post-war, these various colonies became part of Indonesia.

The term “Middle East” is used to capture the location of the arrival or departure of servicemen to this region, which covers Egypt and what was then called Palestine.

Many of the passport-style photos are taken from service files. They are of varying quality. If no image is provided, it probably means that a photo was not in their service file. None of the navy service files have photos.

Imperial measurements are frequently used in the extracts from writings from the war period. The basic units converted into metrics are as follows:

1 inch	25.4 millimetres
1 foot	30.5 centimetres
1 yard	0.914 metres
1 mile	1.61 kilometres
1 pound	0.45 kilograms
1 stone	6.35 kilograms

Pre-decimal currency is quoted in pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d).

3 Some service personnel had more than one number. In these cases, their principal service number is used.

4 In the period up to at least the 1940s the year number was the year the person commenced at Wesley. In more recent decades it has been the practice to use the year the person left Wesley.

# 1939



Lawrence Arthur  
Adamson



Harold John Stewart



Neil Harcourt  
MacNeil

## A look back two decades

1939 was two decades after the 1919 Versailles Treaty concluded “the Great War.” As the intervening years are critical to the stories of the men mentioned in this book it is worth a quick positioning, not so much of world history – return to peace conditions – new countries – boom – depression – the rise of nationalist governments – re-armament – appeasement – new technologies and science developments, but more so of Wesley College, an all-boys primary and secondary Methodist school situated at St Kilda Road, Melbourne, a few kilometres south of the central business district.

Founded in 1866, the school was well-established by the beginning of the 1920s as part of the educational fabric of Melbourne. It was a pivotal member of the Associated Public Schools (APS) that dominated the secondary education sector. Many of the boys would be educated to go to university to study medicine, law, engineering, science, divinity or commerce. However, probably just as many left “early” after obtaining their Intermediate or Leaving Certificate to enter the workforce as clerks, salesmen and factory workers. In addition, some represented Australia’s agricultural strength, with boys from the bush attending as boarders and returning home to work on the farm. There were also careers in the Commonwealth and State Public Service; for some, politics, at all levels, was an option.

The first half of these inter-war years saw the conclusion of the term of Headmaster **Lawrence Arthur Adamson**. Following his appointment in 1902, he built a reputation as “Adamson of Wesley,” a powerful force in education, amateur sport and the Church, who was fiercely proud of his School and the men it produced.

However, his health declined during the latter part of his headmastership, and his deputy, **Harold John Stewart**, took on a more active leadership role. Finally, in 1933, Stewart was appointed Headmaster.

It is accepted that Stewart carried on the role as if he were Adamson, and the school did not change its education and sporting prowess. However, in the mid-1930s, Stewart oversaw a significant rebuild of the school funded by the generosity of the Nicholas brothers. The old Italianate buildings of the 1860s, the beloved *Grey Towers*, were transformed into a neo-classical structure with appropriate referencing to the art deco style of the period. New structures such as a chapel, a swimming pool and a prep school building along Punt Road transformed the School’s appearance.

December 1939 marked the end of the Stewart era. He retired after a life dedicated to Wesley. The appointment of Headmaster **Neil Harcourt MacNeil** was seen as commencing a new era for the school, as there was a need to move on from the Adamson/Stewart period.

The students of this inter-war period were firmly embedded in the Adamson/Stewart traditions of strict discipline, strong Christian ethics (with Methodist overtones), devotion to sport and community service. They attended annual Anzac Day and Armistice Day services, hearing speakers extoll the bravery and the deeds of the Anzacs and the need, as subjects of the British Empire, to be loyal to King and Country.<sup>1</sup>

Family enrolments were also established, with second and third generations creating family traditions. The image below from the 1941 *Chronicle* demonstrates this emerging family tradition.

Many of the teachers were teaching the sons of their former students. There was stability in the ranks (and

<sup>1</sup> The December 1934 *Chronicle* quotes Headmaster Stewart at the Armistice Service: “although we abhor war, we must be prepared to face it when it does come, just as the men of 1914 strove to make themselves fit, not to attack a peaceful people, but to defend their country.”



OLD WESLEY COLLEGIANS' SONS AND GRANDSONS ATTENDING THE SCHOOL  
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER ITS FOUNDATION

only one permanent female teacher). Included in those ranks were renowned teachers, such as **AA Phillips**.<sup>2</sup>

The Wesley College Cadet Corps ceased in 1928 when the federal government disbanded cadet corps around Australia. That would change in 1940.

A classification of the OWs who served in WWII is as follows:

1. Men who saw service in WWI, either in action or training in Australia. Some of these men remained in the military or at least served with the militia units after WWI. By 1939, these men were in their forties or older, and some would hold senior military positions during WWII. Many others joined the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC), especially when Australia was under military threat.
2. Men in their thirties. They were too young for WWI service but experienced that period as boys. Also, while the armed forces were maintained on

a reduced basis in the 1920s and 1930s, it was still a worthwhile career, and several boys joined the Army, RAAF, RAN and RN, with military careers established when WWII commenced.

3. Those born after WWI and by 1939 were in their early twenties, either in their first job or at university. As the war continued, boys would join straight out of school, as happened in WWI.

Reading the *Chronicle* of the 1920s and 1930s, the names and photos of those who would serve and, in some cases, die occur many times in print. One example is the *Dramatic Society* report in the December 1934 edition:

*"Three Live Ghosts" - A war time comedy, it deals with the unexpected return of three soldiers who, having escaped from an enemy prison camp, now find themselves officially "dead." In this play, which contained the more experienced members of the Society, some very fine performances reflected great*

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.\\_A.\\_Phillips](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._A._Phillips)

credit both on the individual performers and on the careful coaching of the producer.

As Mrs Gubbins, **JM Pitt** fulfilled all his promise of last year, and gave the outstanding performance of the evening. His study of the cunning and avaricious but nevertheless kind-hearted "Old Sweetheart" was a most amusing and convincing portrait worthy of the highest praise.

After Pitt's the best performance was probably that of **KM Tuckfield** as Jimmy. His finished style and natural manner easily carried him through a boisterous part and effectively disguised an incongruous interpretation.

However, [the] part, ...played by **RD Rivett**, was probably as good as any of its kind which the Society has seen. The sensitive reserve and nervous tension of the character were well brought out, and the restrained acting took every advantage of a sympathetic role.

Both Pitt and Tuckfield would die in service and Rivett would be a PoW of the Japanese.

### The 1934 Prefects



This photo of the 1934 Prefects pictured with Headmaster Stewart is instructive. WWII service has been identified for ten of the twelve prefects. Two would die on service with the RAAF: **RG Gregory** and **KM Tuckfield**. **IH McBride** would escape capture from the Japanese at Ambon, **RD Rivett** would be captured in Java and be a PoW. Two of the boys would not only serve in WWII but go on to have significant post-WWII service: **GC Hartnell** with the RAAF and **JET Stubbs** with the Army.

### The 1935 Athletics team



Of the thirteen athletes in the photo, eleven have been identified with WWII service. Notable students include:

- **GC Parkin** died in July 1943 when the HMAS *Hobart* was damaged by enemy action.
- **WJ Young** was a *Spitfire* pilot and briefly a PoW in Italy.
- **WE Wildermuth** was a German student. His story of serving in the German Army is told later in this book.
- **SK Pearce** trained as a pilot and was a PoW in Europe after his aircraft was shot down in September 1942.

### The 1936 Cricket Team



Of the twelve cricketers in the photo, all but one of them, have been identified with WWII service. All serving eleven survived the war and are mentioned later in the text.



## 3 September 1939 – Declaration of War

Following the invasion of Poland by German and Russian troops on 1 September 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. **Prime Minister Robert Menzies** (1910) made a radio broadcast on the evening of 3 September to advise Australians that they were now at war. His speech commenced with the following words:

*Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of the persistence of Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.*

*No harder task can fall to the lot of a democratic leader than to make such an announcement. Great Britain and France, with the cooperation of the British Dominions, have struggled to avoid this tragedy.<sup>3</sup>*

The announcement of war did not lead to the outbreak of 1914-style patriotism in Australia. The Prime Minister's own words were that his duty to inform was "melancholy," and the public reaction was subdued. While there was little debate about the merits of supporting England and the Empire in the war against Germany, there was active concern about the ambitions of the Japanese Empire in the Far East.<sup>4</sup>

## The School

From the School's perspective, while the world events leading up to 3 September 1939 and the period beyond would undoubtedly have been the subject of discussion and speculation, it continued doing what it had done for over 70 years: conducting classes and running associated activities.

The internal focus was on Stewart's retirement and MacNeil's appointment as Headmaster.

## Military service

In the period following 1918, Australia's military had been consistently underfunded and neglected. With Japan seen as the principal military threat, the Singapore Strategy was devised to give the nation comfort in the strength of the British Empire naval fleet that would be based in Singapore. The RAN benefited from this policy

with a reasonable fleet of cruisers and destroyers with 5,500 permanent officers and sailors. In contrast, the regular army consisted of 4,000 personnel with minimal equipment. There was a part-time militia of 70,000, but it was poorly trained and under-resourced. Under the Defence Act, the militia could only be used to defend the Australian homeland. The RAAF had 2,600 regular and citizen members but had no modern aircraft and virtually no local manufacturing capacity.

On 15 September 1939, after media and community pressure to announce what military force it proposed to commit to the cause of the British Empire, the Federal Government announced the creation of a special force of 20,000 troops for service at home or abroad. This was the start of the Second AIF under the command of **Lt General Sir Thomas Blamey**.

The Second AIF coexisted with the militia, which was charged with defending the homeland. Many men initially served in the militia before transferring to the AIF for duty overseas.

So, except for five Australian navy destroyers arriving in the Mediterranean to conduct patrol duties, no Australian unit saw any formal action by the end of 1939. However, as noted below, at least one OW saw naval action with the RN.

Australia joined Britain, Canada and New Zealand in creating the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) to supply aircrews for RAF squadrons. Eighteen RAF squadrons would be designated as Australian and formally become RAAF squadrons, but it was common practice for Australian aircrew to be allocated to RAF squadrons. The allocation of men to these squadrons was not under the power of the Australian Government.

In the December 1939 *Chronicle*, there were a few entries about OWs preparing for service:

**Colonel George Alan Vasey** (1907) VX9 who is a graduate of the Duntroon Military College, has been appointed Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master General of the Second AIF.<sup>5</sup> He served in France, and after the Great War was attached to the staff at Quetta, India, later serving on the staff of the Indian First Division. Two years ago, he returned to Australia and was attached to Australian Army Headquarters. He is a son of the late **George B Vasey** (1872) who was a President of the OWCA. His brother, **GH Vasey** (1916) is a member of the Melbourne University Engineering staff.<sup>6</sup>



Robert Menzies



George Alan Vasey

3 [https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/prime\\_ministers/menzies](https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/prime_ministers/menzies).

4 Stocking, *Bardia* especially pp26-28.

5 Specifically, Vasey's appointment was to the newly formed 6th Division, which was the first unit of the Second AIF.

6 The *Chronicle* failed to note that another brother John (1907) was killed at Lone Pine, Gallipoli in August 1915.



Edward James  
Milford



Herbert William  
Lloyd



John Stewart  
Whitelaw

- On 15 December 1939, George Vasey sailed from Melbourne as a leader of the advance party of 110 men to establish camps and facilities for the Second AIF in Palestine. He would have a significant leadership record in WWII and, with Edward Milford, arguably the most significant military OW in WWII. There will be more on his career later in this book. Unfortunately, he died in a plane crash off the Queensland coast in March 1945.

**Edward James Milford** (1908) VX12014 has been appointed Brigadier commanding Royal Artillery, 7th Division AIF. He graduated from Duntroon Military College in 1915, and during the Great War served in Egypt and France, and was awarded the DSO. From France he went to the Royal Artillery College, Woolwich. He was Staff Officer at Australia House 1925 to 1929, and passed through the Staff College, Camberley, 1931 and 1932. Before his appointment to the 7th Division, he was Director of Artillery at Army Headquarters, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

- Milford and Vasey had joined the Royal Military College, Duntroon (RMC) in early 1913, straight from Wesley. Their paths would cross several times during WWII.

**Brigadier-General Herbert William Lloyd** (1898) VX133091 relinquished the post of Director-General of Recruiting for the AIF, and was appointed Deputy Adjutant-General with offices at the Army Head Quarters, Victorian Barracks. He began his military career in the Victorian Field Artillery in 1908, and later joined the administrative and instructional staff in New South Wales. As adjutant of the 1st Artillery Brigade, he was in the landing on Gallipoli, and served with distinction through the subsequent campaign and in France, finishing with the rank of Brigadier-General. He won the DSO, was mentioned in despatches four times, and was awarded the Order of the White Eagle of Serbia in 1915, CMG in 1917, CB in 1919 and CVO in 1920, after the visit of the Prince of Wales to Australia. He represented the Commonwealth Government on the Prince's tour. His services were again requisitioned when the King and Queen, then Duke and Duchess of York, visited Australia. In 1925 he left the military service and went into commercial life. Subsequently he was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.

- In October 1940, he took over the 2nd Division (militia), which was based in NSW but moved to WA in August 1942. In September 1943, he transferred to the 1st Division back in NSW. Between May 1945 and January 1946, he administered command of the Second Army, retiring in February 1946 as an honorary major-general.

**John Stewart Whitelaw** (1909) VX97 was one of the first RMC graduates. Wounded at Gallipoli, he returned to Australia and saw out WWI with the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery, which was responsible for all coastal artillery batteries around Australia. In October 1920, Whitelaw was transferred to the Staff Corps with the rank of Captain. Following this, he undertook further artillery officers' training at the School of Gunnery before taking a post there as an instructor in 1927. An appointment to the UK followed, lasting from 1928 until early 1931, when he returned to Australia to take up the post of chief instructor at the School of Artillery. In July 1937, he was promoted to Lt-Colonel following a stint on the general staff at Army Headquarters in Melbourne

Whitelaw was promoted to Colonel a month after the outbreak of WWII and took on the role of the commander of all coastal defences in NSW. He undertook a couple of overseas study tours in his official capacity, first to the Netherlands East Indies and then to Singapore to investigate the development of coastal artillery in Allied forces.

His son, **Frederick Thomas 'Fred' Whitelaw** (1936) NX149434 entered the RMC in 1937 and graduated in 1940 and was assigned to an anti-aircraft (AA) Brigade. By the end of the war, he was in command of 53rd Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Heavy). In 1951, Fred Whitelaw was General Staff Officer (GSO) Grade 1 in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Kure, Japan. In 1961, he was commander of the Royal Tasmania Regiment. After a period as commander of the Australian Army Force, Far East Land Forces, in November 1971, Brigadier Whitelaw commenced a two-year term as a commander of ANZUK forces in Singapore.

John's youngest son, **John Stewart Whitelaw** (1936) was a 21-year-old when he enlisted in the militia on 11 June 1939 and was posted to the 10th Field Brigade, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA). He was with the 14th Field Regiment 1942-44 and 4th Field Regiment 1944-46. He would have a distinguished service following WWII. Including in 1970, the Chief of Staff at Headquarters Australian Army Forces Vietnam. After promotion to Major General, his postings included Chief of Operations and Chief of Personnel. In 1977, he assumed the position of Deputy Chief of the General Staff until his retirement in 1978.

**Major Harry Carter** (1904) V80468, age 49 years, served with distinction in WWI and was a regular at the School's Anzac Day services. He enlisted with the HQ Southern Command as Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) on 5 October 1939. He was hospitalised in October 1940 with chronic cholecystitis and relinquished his role in April 1941 when he was returned to the Reserve of Officers.

**William Matthew Algie** (1913) VP7402 left Wesley at the end of 1913 for the RMC. With service in the first AIF from November 1916, he was severely wounded in May 1918 and returned to Australia. He continued with Staff Corps postings, rising to Major in 1936. One of his roles in the mid-1930s was the DAAG (Mobilisation & Reserves) in the 3rd Military District being involved in the planning for the eventual mobilisation of the Army in the event of war. In May 1940, he was appointed a Lt-Colonel and posted as AAG of the Land HQ Directorate of Recruiting and Mobilisation. In January 1944, he was appointed the Army Representative on the Inter-service Demobilisation Committee Planning Staff. In July 1945, he was attached to the Defence Secretariat. He retired for medical reasons in May 1947 due to issues with his WWI wound with the rank of Honorary Colonel.

**Archie David Molloy** (1925) VX18 graduated from RMC as a Lieutenant in the Australian Staff Corps in 1930. He served as an officer on the Indian Northwest Frontier during 1934-35. In October 1939, with the rank of Captain, he joined the AIF as a Signals Staff Officer with the Directorate of Mechanisation, which was raised as part of the Army Headquarters Ordnance Branch. He would go to the Middle East in January 1940 and have a career in the Army that finished in 1960.

**Kenneth Winston Giles** (1932) VX119287, a 23-year-old chiropodist, had militia service between 1933-37 with the 5th Battalion and enlisted with the Permanent Military Forces (VP4365) on 27 September 1939 in the RAA. He was involved in coastal battery defences in Victoria. In August 1941, he was sent to serve at the gun battery at Darwin's East Point base. He transferred to the AIF in September 1942. He attended the Officers' Training Course (OTC) at Woodside, SA and, in May 1943, transferred to Sydney's harbour defences and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in August 1943. He remained in the Sydney area for the rest of WWII; he had several health issues and related hospitalisations. In October 1947, he joined the interim Army with the rank of Warrant Officer. He remained in the Army for the rest of his working career, including HQ admin and Quartermaster (QM) duties with the BCOF in Japan and Korea in 1954-56. He continued in Army HQ roles with Eastern Command until his discharge, being medically unfit in March 1971 with the rank of Major but with the military title of Lt-Colonel.

**Lt Keith Emerson Featherstone** (1918) VX8901 was a 33-year-old commercial traveller when he enlisted in November 1939. He was quickly promoted to Lieutenant and arrived with the 2/7th Battalion in the Middle East in May 1940. However, he had significant health issues and was returned to Australia in December 1940. He

left the AIF in January 1941 to join the militia 17th Garrison Battalion (V10721) and was posted to the No 4 Internment camp at Tatura. His file indicates that he was absent without leave (AWL) from May 1941 to September 1942, with his commission cancelled in March 1942. A Burns Philp staff service record records a person with this name was employed by them in December 1941 as an accounts clerk and storeman and was evacuated from Port Moresby in March 1942.<sup>7</sup>

**Edward Alexander (Alec) Cato** (1900) 3955 manager of *Moran and Cato, Fitzroy*, who served in the No 4 Flying Squadron during the last war, has been appointed to command the Victorian wing of the new Cadet Air Training Corps and will be given the rank of Wing-Commander in the ATC. He will command 1 Cadet Wing, comprising all Victorian Squadrons.

- He was one of the sons of Frederick Cato, a major educational benefactor. The Cato Room at the St Kilda Road campus is named in his memory. Cato's widow, Maria Christina Cato, bequeathed a significant Australian art collection to the School.



**Above:** Wing-Commander EA Cato inspecting members of the Air Training Corps, March 1944 (AWM)

**Dr Edwin Thomas Cato** (1901) of 2 Collins Street, Melbourne has joined up with the Royal Air Force. He holds the rank of Squadron Leader with the Royal Australian Air Force.

- A brother of Alec Cato. He had been awarded the Military Cross (MC) for his medical service in WWI. He had been serving with the RAAF in the medical branch of the Citizen Air Force since August 1936. He was commissioned in the RAF on 24 October 1939 and went to serve in England in senior medical roles. A child from his first marriage, Hugh Orme Cato, (not an OW), was killed flying with the RAF's 15 Squadron over



William Matthew Algie



Kenneth Winston Giles

<sup>7</sup> <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/168251>





Thomas Langton  
Tyrer

Germany in November 1944. Edwin's second wife, Marjorie Vasey, whom he married in 1958, was George Vasey's youngest sister.

**James Arthur Bellamy** (1927) of Park Street, South Yarra, went to England last February to join the RAF. He has obtained a commission, and is Acting Pilot Officer. He is doing a course of training for the position of Air Gunner Officer at No. 1 Air Armament School, Royal Air Force.

- There is no further reference to him in subsequent *Chronicles*, except in May 1947, there is the following: *Any OW going to England might be interested to look up JA Bellamy, who is at 17 Wake Green Road, Moseley, Birmingham. In England when war broke out, he served with the English forces in the Middle East, Normandy, Holland and Germany.* The London Gazette of 28 November 1939 notes his acting pilot officer status effective 5 November (service number 75686), but a later Gazette advises this was terminated on 29 January 1940 on "cessation of duty." The author has been unable to locate details of any subsequent service. He continued to live in England and died in 1975.

**Lt Robert Henry Allen** (1918—Senior Boy, Captain of Cricket). Allen is not only a Prep Old Boy, for he continued in the Big School, and was appointed a Prefect in 1928. At the end of that year, he went to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, and entered the Royal Navy two years later. He was completing his fourth year of service in HMS Exeter, when that gallant ship joined battle with the Graf Spee and helped to vanquish it at Monte Video. He is now serving with the Home Fleet.

- This action is known as the Battle of the River Plate, when the RN ships the *Exeter*, *Ajax* and *Achilles* engaged with the German pocket battleship on 13 December 1939. The *Exeter* sustained severe damage with over 100 casualties. While the battle was broken off, the *Graf Spee* was scuttled on 17 December off Montevideo, Uruguay.

**Surgeon-Commander Henry Woodall Gault** (1911) of the Royal Australian Navy, has returned from England, where he completed a medical course.

- Henry Gault joined the RAN in 1927, as an ophthalmologist, both on ships and shore postings.

During the period 3 September to 31 December 1939, one OW died whilst in service and another was injured in a car accident:

- **Captain Arthur Mawson** (1914) died on 23 October 1939, aged 39. A doctor attached to 15th Field Ambulance; he died of a sudden heart attack at Seymour prior to an inspection of the Seymour Military camp by the Governor-General. He was

cremated at Springvale two days later, and his ashes buried at the Burwood Cemetery.

- **Captain Thomas Langton Tyrer** (1910) VX8231 regimental medical officer of 29th Battalion at Seymour Camp, suffered from concussion and a seriously lacerated right leg when his car crashed into a tree on the Tallarook-Trawool road on Monday, 20 November.
  - Tyrer would recover from this accident and enlist with the AIF in May 1940.