



Serving Georgians

Written by Brian Wills-Johnson (1964)

The First World War, known at the time as the Great War, was fresh in the memories of those who in 1939 listened to Prime Minister Robert Menzies broadcast on the 'wireless' that it was his "melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of the persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and, as a result, Australia is also at war".

The Great War had exacted a fearsome toll on Australia. With a population of fewer than 5 million, more than 60,000 of the 416,809 who had voluntarily enlisted had been killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner – a casualty rate of more than 50 percent. Just 21 years later the sons and daughters of that generation of soldiers, sailors and aircrew were again being asked to commit themselves to a second meatgrinder, differing only from the first by its killing efficiency.

Nonetheless, members of the College answered the call. Of the 311 freshmen who walked through the College Archway before and during the war, 163 joined the armed forces, an extraordinary 52 percent. Another six, who came to College after the war ended, had enlisted during the war, and we also recognise them on the honour board in the Archway.

The RAAF was the service of choice for most Georgians, with 67 signing on. The next most popular were the Army with 52, and the Royal Australian Navy with 17. The Civilian Military Force, our last line of defence, enlisted 29. William Robert Cuthbertson, Henry James Hopkins, and Percival John Hamilton Rowan all enlisted in Britain's Royal Air Force. Two of them paid the ultimate price, with Bill Cuthbertson shot down in a Lancaster over France, and Percy Rowan's Blenheim shot down over the North Sea.

Records of the British Army are difficult to access, but Sydney James Mayne (1934) is noted in the *London Gazette* as having been promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in the Corps of Royal Engineers.

Inevitably, with lists of this kind, there will be errors and omissions. John Boyd Craig, whose service was well known to the College, was difficult to locate in official records. He came to St George's in 1937 to study medicine, and enlisted in the RAAF, but there is no record of him in the National Archives of Australia's roll of military personnel. The Commonwealth of Australia Gazette in 1943, however, notes his appointment as a flight lieutenant (with an M.B.B.S) in November 1942. *The Age* in Melbourne announced in 1947 that John, now a squadron leader in the RAAF, had become engaged to Miss Audrey Herring. The honour board has room to add stragglers if and as we find them.

Perhaps the most determined volunteer was Maurice Norman Brearley (1937), who not only had to overcome the challenges of a father who was a group captain in the RAAF but, as an engineer, was in a reserved occupation and thus prevented by law from leaving it without permission, both of which made it very difficult for him to enlist. He was also, equally problematically, colour blind, which would have automatically disqualified him from becoming a pilot. In the hope that his father wouldn't discover him in the records, he changed his name to Maurice Burnett, and scraped through his colour-blindness test by memorising the numbers on the standard charts. His service record in the National Archives uses his correct name, but still lists a fictitious uncle as his next of kin, and his fictitious birth date. Maurice got his wings, and spent the last year of the war with 77 Squadron in Dutch New Guinea, after which he added a first class honours in structural engineering to his B.Eng.

Among the families whose sons enlisted, five experienced double the risk with two brothers volunteering and, in the sixth case, three brothers took up the cause.

These three were Alfred Thomas Taylor (1941), his younger brother Vincent Francis (also 1941), and Joseph Arthur (1943). All three had attended Christian Brothers College in Kalgoorlie, and all had enrolled in engineering at UWA. Alfred enlisted in the AIF in 1941 but was not posted overseas, and was able to complete his engineering degree while serving in ordnance at the Bushmead base. Vincent signed up to the CMF in November 1941 and was called up for full-time duty the following January, doing service with artillery and spending some time at the Rottneest Island battery. As a student, he was able to simultaneously continue his studies, and graduated with a B.Sc. (Eng.) in April 1944. Joseph, the youngest brother, failed all six of his first-year engineering units in 1943, telling the Warden that he'd done so because then he could join the RAAF. He enlisted in January 1944, and as a Leading Aircraftman was posted to RAAF Stores until his discharge in August 1945.

The Anderson family from Narrogin was not so fortunate. Charles Vernon Anderson (1936) enlisted with the RAAF in September 1939, but was killed off Fremantle in February 1941 during a flying exercise. At the university's graduation ceremony soon afterwards, he was awarded his Bachelor of Engineering posthumously. His younger brother, Erl Peter Anderson (1944) joined the RAAF four years later, but saw the war out unscathed.

The two Craddock brothers, John Denman (1933) and Leonard Harwood (1937) went in separate directions, with John joining the AIF and Leonard the RAN. John had already graduated from medicine and had married two years earlier when he joined up in May 1944. He spent most of his war years in an army hospital in Sydney, but remained on the army's list as a reserve officer until 1964. Leonard completed his law degree after three years in the navy's coding branch.

The Hands brothers were also from Bunbury. John Lawrence (1933) and Peter Edward (1939) joined the AIF and the CMF respectively; while Harold John Rowe (1932) and Sydney Lawrence Rowe (1934), from the remote mining town of Gwalia, joined the AIF and the RAAF. John (Jack) Hands was to become a Prisoner of War, suffering in Burma and Japan. Syd was to die over France on 4 May 1944, piloting a Lancaster bomber.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the sibling enlistees was Geoffrey George Rossiter (1937), whose brother Reginald Clarence (1936) had joined the CMF. Geoffrey had completed his BA at UWA in 1937 and then first-class honours in Latin in 1938. On the outbreak of war he joined the RAAF and was posted to Britain's No. 10 Coastal Command, where he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. In 1946, after war's end, he was named Western Australia's Rhodes Scholar, and subsequently had a 30-year career in Canberra as Executive Secretary of the Fulbright Scholar program, and then Warden of Burton Hall at the Australian National University.

Our Honour Board was funded after a successful application to the Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program, an initiative of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Responding to a suggestion by the Minister, Matt Keogh, the College has now also entered its Wall of Remembrance on the Australian War Memorial's website Places of Pride, at <https://placesofpride.awm.gov.au/memorials/269034>