

# Speers Point's brave Brothers in Arms

THOMAS Frith and his wife Maria endured the tragic loss of not just one son but two within the all too brief space of a month during World War II.

Having only just accepted the awful realisation that 29-year-old Robert would not be coming home, the Friths were then informed Ernest, 32, had also been killed in action.

The Frith brothers' names and those of the eight soldiers with a connection to Speers Point who lost their lives in the war of 1939-45 are perpetuated on the honour roll at the local RSL Club.

In all, 165 from Speers Point enlisted in WWII.



**RESTING PLACE:** *The World War II section of Ismailia War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt, where Robert Frith is buried.*

Robert Hamilton Frith, a solicitor, enlisted on December 6, 1940, attaining the rank of Flying Officer with the Royal Australian Air Force.

At the time of his death, June 30, 1942, he was attached to the Royal Air Force's 203 Squadron in the Middle East.

He was buried in the Ismailia Cemetery in Egypt.

Ernest Francis Hamilton, who also worked in law, signed up for Air Force duty in Sydney on February 3, 1941.

A Pilot Officer with 10 Squadron (United Kingdom), Ernest's plane went down off the coast of Spain on July 31, 1942 and he was officially presumed dead.

The loss of her boys took its toll on poor Maria, who had already lost another son, young James, in 1918. She and her husband had a large family and were widely respected throughout the district. Thomas Frith was a pillar of the community and a leading businessman who was also a shire president.



**MONUMENT:** *The Speers Point War Memorial at Lake Macquarie which was dedicated on Armistice Day, 1976.*

Losing two sons was too much for Maria to bear and, heartbroken, she passed away in 1948. Thomas died in 1957.

Robert's next of kin was his wife Marjorie Esme, whom he had married in 1937.

Having kept the home fire burning and now a widow, Marjorie Esme, at age 31, bravely went out to do her bit for the war effort and to honour her husband's sacrifice, enlisting with the Army on February 23, 1943 and serving for just over two years.



APRIL 2009

Brought to you by  
**GREG PIPER MP**  
Member for Lake Macquarie



## The taste of ANZAC

THE story of the ANZAC Biscuit stems from the concern of mothers, wives and girlfriends of WWI soldiers. They feared their men overseas were not getting enough nutritional value. Food supplies had to be carried in ships which were slow, so a recipe was formulated for a biscuit which had both nutritional value and lasting qualities.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup plain flour
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup sugar
- ¾ cup desiccated coconut
- 1 tablespoon golden syrup
- 125g (4oz) butter (or margarine)
- 1½ teaspoons bicarbonate of soda
- 2 tablespoons boiling water

### Method

Mix flour, oats, sugar and coconut. Melt the syrup and butter over gentle heat. Dissolve bicarb soda in boiling water, stir in syrup

mixture and pour over dry ingredients. Stir until well mixed. Put heaped teaspoons of mixture, on greased oven trays, about 5cm apart to allow for spreading. Bake in moderately slow oven (180C or 350F) for about 20 minutes or until golden. Remove from oven and leave on trays for a few minutes, then lift off with a spatula.



# LEGEND OF ANZAC

# 2009 ANZAC Day activities in the region

## BOULAROO-SPEERS POINT

- 5.30am: Assemble at Lake Macquarie Council car park for march to Speers Point Cenotaph.
- 6.00am: Dawn Service at Speers Point Cenotaph. Breakfast at Speers Point RSL Club after service.

## CARDIFF

- 5.10am: Dawn Service at Cardiff RSL Club. Breakfast afterwards.

## DOYALSON-WYEE

- 5.00am: Dawn Service at the Doyalson-Wyee RSL Club. Breakfast afterwards.
- 8.30am: March steps off from the Presbyterian Church in Wyee Rd for the War Memorial at the RSL Club. Form up at 8am.
- 9.00am: ANZAC Commemoration Service at the War Memorial.

## MORISSET

- 6.00am: Dawn Service at the Morisset Country Club. Breakfast afterwards.
- 10.00am: March from Morisset train station to the Country Club. Form up at 9.30am.
- 10.30am: ANZAC Service at the Country Club.

## RATHMINES

- 3.00pm: ANZAC Service at the Catalina Memorial in Catalina Park.

*PLEASE NOTE: All times and venues have been supplied by various RSL Sub-Branch officials. Care has been taken to ensure as many Electorate services as possible have been included and were correct at the time of publication. For verification of other services please contact your local RSL Sub-Branch.*

## TERALBA

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

## TORONTO

- 5.00am: Dawn Service at the Toronto RSL Club. Breakfast afterwards.
- 10.50am: March steps off from Toronto Post Office to the War Memorial in Goffet Park. Form up at 10.40am.
- 11.00am: ANZAC Service at the Memorial. Refreshments afterwards at the club.

## WANGI WANGI

- 5.30am: Dawn Service at the War Memorial at Wangi RSL Club.
- 10.00am: March steps off in Puna St for the War Memorial. Form up at 9.45am. ANZAC Service at the Memorial to follow march.

## WYONG

- 5.45am: Dawn Service at Wyong RSL Carpark
- 9.30am: Morning Service commencing at Wyong Town Centre Park, Cnr Alison Road and Rankens Court. This will be followed by a march along Hely St, into Anzac Ave., into Margaret St and concluding at the RSL carpark.

# 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 experiences need no garnishing and the reality is both heroically and selflessly served their country in its greatest hour of need.

They served during those dark, desperate days, when Australia's defence was under very real threat and their close bond has developed over the past 15 years and strengthened as other colleagues have passed on, gradually thinning the ranks of brave airmen from the old RAAF Base Rathmines.

Gordon, 88, and Don, 82, do what they can to keep the memory of Rathmines alive.

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.

Having completed operational training and become part of a complete and permanent



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

crew, 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 to No. 43 Squadron and from there took part in 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, but the RAAF required his mother's approval as he was then only 18.

He did his air gunner's training at West Sale in Victoria then headed straight to Rathmines and on completion of training became a member of a Catalina crew under Flight Lieutenant Jack Wells in mid-1945, beginning what is now a lifelong association with the plane.



## VC winner in a rare group

SAS Trooper Mark Donaldson joined a select "band of brothers" when he became the first recipient of the Victoria Cross for Australia.

He is one of only 10 winners of the VC alive in the world today.

For more than two hours in south-eastern Afghanistan last September 2, Tpr Donaldson, 29, repeatedly fought alone in open

ground raked by accurate and heavy Taliban machine-gun fire to allow his wounded comrades to be dragged to safety.

Deliberate exposure to draw enemy fire away from the wounded would have been enough for a VC recommendation, but Tpr Donaldson then sprinted 80 metres over the same killing ground to save the life of a seriously wounded Afghan interpreter.

In the words of the award citation, Tpr Donaldson "reacted spontaneously to regain the initiative" following an ambush which inflicted the worst casualties suffered by Australia since the Vietnam War.

The VC for Australia replaces the original VC which was awarded to 96 Australians, including nine from Gallipoli.

Australia's only other surviving VC winners are Keith Payne, 75, and Ted Kenna, 89.

**PICTURE:** Trooper Mark Donaldson, VC, stands proudly behind his Victoria Cross medal, which is now on loan to the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

## Bid to keep 'Cat' flying

THE Catalina Flying Memorial was originally founded by members of the Seaplane Pilots Association of Australia initially to buy, restore and operate a PBY Catalina aircraft for the benefit of the Catalina Association of NSW and the Catalina Aircrew Group. A "Cat", a 1945 model PBY6, was acquired in Portugal where it was last used as an aerial fire-fighting water bomber. There were 168 Catalinas used extensively in WWII by the RAAF and it was to Australia what the Spitfire was to England. The Catalina's wartime exploits are legendary. It played a vital role when the enemy was at our doorstep and virtually saved Australia. Sadly, 320 Australian Catalina aircrew did not return from long-range bombing missions, mine laying, air-sea rescue and reconnaissance missions. It is the Memorial's intention to maintain and operate this beautiful "Cat" in its original configuration and to then house it at Rathmines at Lake Macquarie. For more information, visit [www.catalinaflying.org.au](http://www.catalinaflying.org.au)



# No shark or tin leg could keep Attie grounded

SHEER guts and determination enabled many servicemen to see it through World War II.

Decorated airman Athol (Attie) Galway Hope Wearne was one of the bravest of them all, serving with distinction despite losing a leg in a shark attack during the war.

Wearne was a 26-year-old officer at the Royal Australian Air Force Catalina base at Cairns when his life changed in an instant.

Treading water whilst swimming at Trinity Beach on September 12, 1942, Wearne was mauled by a tiger shark about three metres in length.

His right foot and calf were severed but Wearne survived the horrific ordeal.

Afterwards Wearne would have his leg surgically amputated below the knee and fitted with an aluminium leg, complete with built-in bottle opener!

But nothing would stop him from getting back behind the controls of his beloved Catalinas.

"It was a fine aeroplane to fly,



**A FINE GROUP:** Attie Wearne (front row, sixth from left) in a group portrait of trainee pilots of No. 1 Flying Training School A Course, January to October 1939. Sadly, of the 40 pictured, 14 made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II.

very docile, but its greatest asset, of course, was its long-range capability," he said many years later.

Asked how he managed to fly with his handicap, Wearne replied: "I just knew that I had to put more pressure on the leg, that was all. If the seas were very heavy and take-offs were very heavy sometimes I'd get my second pilot to assist on my right leg if I couldn't hold the rudder. But nine times out of 10, it was perfectly OK."

Group Captain Wearne was still

able to fly Catalinas from Cairns in 11 and 20 Squadrons and later commanded the base at Rathmines.

During his Cairns posting he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for outstanding achievements on difficult operational flights in 1943 and in 1946 he received a Distinguished Service Order.

Wearne remained in the RAAF until 1968, retiring on his 52nd birthday. This fine and courageous Australian lived until he was 87, passing away in August 2004.

# A day of pride, remembrance

APRIL 25 is a date burned into the conscience of a grateful nation. It is a day on which communities across Australia pause to remember the fallen in conflicts down through the decades.

Also on this day of commemoration we think of today's men and women serving our country under trying conditions and in dangerous situations, in places such as Afghanistan, East Timor and Iraq.

We pray for their safe and speedy return.

The Spirit of ANZAC burns as brightly now as it ever did. Numbers at dawn services and morning marches in cities, towns and villages seem to increase each ANZAC Day.

It is a wonderful tribute to those who have served Australia in all theatres of war that the popularity of this day of remembrance grows each year.

The recent growth in ANZAC Day crowds show today's generation cares deeply and is greatly appreciative of the sacrifices made so that we may now live in relative peace.

I have produced this booklet to further foster the true meaning of ANZAC and trust it will prove a keepsake for all who uphold this great tradition.

Local service times have been included as a handy reference. I hope you are able to make it to an ANZAC Day commemoration this year.

**Greg Piper MP**  
Member for Lake Macquarie



**REFLECTIVE:** Greg Piper MP at one of the memorial walls at the Catalina Base Memorial at the old RAAF Base Rathmines. **COVER:** Mr Piper (centre) with FLG Off Gordon Wicks (ret) (left) and FLTSGT Donald Lowe (ret) at the Rathmines monument.

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## AWM well worth a visit

OFFICIAL World War I historian Charles Bean first began thinking about commemorating the sacrifice of Australians in war in 1915, at Gallipoli.

The idea of a national museum took hold later, while Bean was at Pozières, France, where the Australian divisions suffered 23,000 casualties in less than seven weeks of fighting in 1916.

Bean's idea was to set aside a place in Australia where families and friends could grieve for those buried far away and difficult to visit – a place which would also contribute to the understanding of war itself. His vision – the Australian War Memorial in Canberra – was opened on November 11, 1941.

"The museum is part of our national heritage and I encourage everyone to visit it at least once in their lifetime," State MP Greg Piper said.

Entry is free (donations welcome) and the AWM is open 10am-5pm daily.



## Birth of the ANZAC Legend

ANZAC Day marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during The Great War of 1914-18. The acronym ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, whose soldiers were known as ANZACs. They landed at Gallipoli, Turkey, in the pre-dawn darkness on April 25, 1915, to begin a determined yet ultimately unsuccessful eight-month campaign against the Ottoman Empire which resulted, according to the Australian War Memorial, in 26,111 Australian casualties, including 8141 deaths. It also led to the birth of the ANZAC Legend, an intangible yet undeniable fighting spirit of commitment, courage, mateship and sacrifice embedded in all who wear the Australian military uniform. ANZAC marches were held all over Australia in 1916. The first year in which all States observed some form of public holiday together on ANZAC Day was 1927.



**MAJESTIC 'CATS':** Catalinas from No. 3 Operational Training Unit (Rathmines) on a formation flying exercise. This unit provided the final training for the crews of Nos. 11, 20, 42 and 43 squadrons in the multiple tasks of long-range reconnaissance, supply-dropping, bombing and mine-laying in World War II. *Picture: Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942.*



**LEST WE FORGET:** A plaque with a poignant message about lives lost and comrades remembered at the Rathmines War Memorial.



**PEACEFUL PLACE:** The Catalina RAAF Base Memorial at Rathmines with a path leading between the two memorial walls containing the names of those from the base who lost their lives in World War II and others who have since passed away. The obelisk, erected in 1972, contains a propeller from a flying boat.

# Rathmines' pivotal role in our nation's defence

THE deafening roar of those magnificent flying boats, the Catalinas, has been replaced over the old Rathmines air base with the more tranquil sounds of many forms of birdlife.

No longer does the gentle breeze blowing in over Lake Macquarie carry the mighty and sleek patrol bomber, which dominated the skies over the area during World War II.

The "Black Cats", as they were affectionately called, have long disappeared but their powerful legacy remains and is evident in many locations around the old base site.

Rathmines has a rich and colourful history. The Rathmines site on the shores of Lake Macquarie was first identified as a possible place for a flying boat base in 1936 after a ground and water survey of the bay and inlet was undertaken.

During July 1938 Joseph Eric Hewitt, the Wing Commander who would command the Rathmines base, was sent to investigate landing areas and sites around Lake Macquarie. The base became operational when the No. 9 Squadron transferred from Point Cook, Victoria, to Rathmines, with Seagull flying boats.

In September 1939, just as the storm clouds of war were hovering large over Europe, the Rathmines base was set up and arrangements made to rent local cottages as living quarters.

Catalina flying boats arrived at the base in February 1941 and by September 1943 the base comprised 14 Catalinas, two Seagulls, a Dornier and a Dolphin. During training, many personnel brought their families to live in the towns and villages near the Rathmines base which influenced the establishment of other services such a post office and school.

Rathmines became the largest RAAF flying boat base in the Southern Hemisphere. Lake Macquarie was a perfect spot as it is Australia's largest saltwater lake and is four times the size of Sydney Harbour with 175 kilometres of shoreline.

At various stages during World War II, Rathmines housed Nos. 9 (Walrus), 11, 20 and 43 (Catalina), 40 (Sunderland and Martin Mariner), 41 (Dornier Do 24K, Mariner and S23 Empire) and 107 (Kingfisher) Squadrons.

The Rathmines RAAF seaplane base played an integral part in the defence of Australia in World War II and its flying boats were involved with the mining of Manilla Harbour and played an important part in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942.

The base reached its peak strength of almost 3000 RAAF personnel in 1944-45. It comprised 230 buildings and marine facilities and there were 40 aircraft in service.

After World War II, Rathmines was used as a ground training base and the Officers' Training School was formed there along with training facilities for senior non-commissioned officers, physical training instructors and national servicemen.

In 1962, the base was sold to Lake Macquarie Council. Many buildings were privately purchased and removed from the site or used by the Council as community halls.

A large hangar, complete with electrically-operated doors, which was used for servicing seaplanes and flying boats, was pulled down and shipped to RAAF Base Richmond to house the RAAF's then-new C-130A Hercules aircraft.

The original Rathmines base has now been heritage listed by the State Government and an application for similar recognition has been made to the Federal Government so funds may be raised for the erection of a hangar-type museum from which the Catalina Flying Memorial's Catalina, VH-CAT will eventually operate.

The base has ongoing significance to WWII service personnel and to the community of Lake Macquarie, who recognise the site's history and continue to use the site, creating an evolving landscape which retains significant elements of the RAAF base.



**SKYWARD:** From the cover of the 1943 publication RAAF Log.