

RADAR GUNNER



Dick Dakeyne, DFC

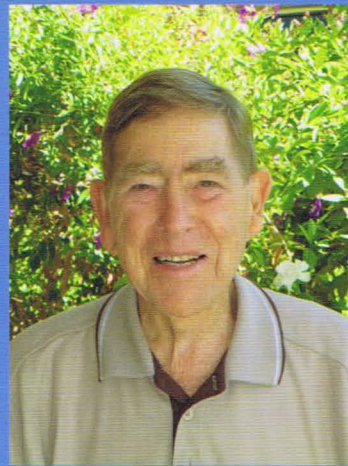
Born and raised in Sydney, Dick Dakeyne survived 48 missions and 500 hours flying over Japanese enemy territory during World War Two, both as a gunner and radar countermeasures operator. Most of his service was spent living and flying with US Army Air Force bomb squadrons based at Fenton airstrip 140 kilometres south of Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia.

Dick's account describes living with the Americans and flying in B-24 Liberator long-range heavy bombers, on record-breaking missions lasting up to 16 hours. Death surrounded him, with the loss of fellow servicemen from Japanese ack-ack (anti-aircraft) guns, machine gun fire from enemy planes, and bombing raids on northern Australia. Aircraft were lost from the hazards of flying vast distances over empty oceans, through tropical storms and into massive weather fronts.

For his military service and bravery, Dick was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) from Australia. The United States also offered him one of their highest awards, the Medal of Freedom. However, the Australian Government's policy at the time barred Australians from receiving this American award, and on Dick's behalf, refused acceptance.



Dick Dakeyne, 19 years of age, 1943.



Dick Dakeyne, 90 years of age, 2014.

ISBN 978-098713896-5



9 780987 138965

RADAR GUNNER

DICK DAKEYNE, DFC

Edited by Craig Bellamy and David M. Welch



Published by David M. Welch

FOREWORD

Dick **Dakeyne** was a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) member who served during the Second World War, based at **Fenton Airfield** south of **Darwin** in Australia's remote Northern Territory. He was trained both in air gunnery and the use of a new top-secret piece of equipment, the Australian-invented SN2, for enemy radar detection. Because of his radar countermeasures expertise, Dick was attached to American squadrons with long-range **Liberator (B-24) bombers** and he recorded the positions of Japanese radar installations while flying combat and reconnaissance missions over Japanese-held territory.

On a Liberator, Dick could quickly swap role and position from Radar Countermeasures (RCM) Operator above the bomb bay to Waist Gunner, manning a .50 calibre Browning M2 heavy machine-gun pointing out a side window. This unusual dual role, as both a radar detector and air gunner, earned him admiration from fellow crew-members, and the intelligence data he gathered was sent directly to General MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane. For his military service and bravery, Dick was awarded the **Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)** and was nominated for the **US Medal of Freedom**.

Because he served in a top-secret unit – **Section 22** – Dick was advised not to keep a war diary in case this fell into enemy hands. He did, however, keep a log book and took numerous photographs during the war years, many reproduced here.



World War Two (1939-1945) arose from the expansionist and imperialist policies of Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia and the Pacific. Australia became involved in both theatres of war by providing support for its allies, Britain and America.

Japan had a history of expansionism and aggression, including its invasions of China during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Korea during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Manchuria in 1931, and China again with the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

In the Pacific region, the British Empire encompassed Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, eastern New Guinea and Australia, while American interests included the Philippines, Hawaii, and Samoa. The Netherlands governed the

Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia, including western New Guinea), while the Portuguese colonised East Timor.

When Japanese imperial forces invaded and bombed the above colonies during 1941 and 1942, the parent countries retaliated, and northern Australia became a launching point for major offensives against Japanese-held territory. Two major strikes by the Japanese against American war ships (in **Pearl Harbor**, Hawaii on 7th December 1941 and in **Darwin Harbour**, northern Australia on 19th February 1942) were intended to reduce America's defences. Instead, they resulted in America's declaration of war and engagement in World War Two, and brought northern Australia to the forefront of war in the Pacific.

In northern Australia, more than twenty military airfields were built and over 110,000 Defence personnel, including Australians, Britons, New Zealanders, Americans and Dutch, were mobilised to fight the Japanese invasion of countries to the north. As Japanese intelligence established the whereabouts of Australian bases, these also became targets for Japanese bombing raids. More than 100 Japanese bombing raids were made across northern Australia, including 64 on the Darwin region in the Northern Territory.

From 1999 to 2013, aviation historian **Craig Bellamy** recorded Dick's story including 23 taped interviews with over 30 hours of conversation. He was a frequent visitor to the Dakeyne household while working in Grafton and living relatively close to Dick and Val. Craig researched the Units, Groups and Squadrons in which Dick served, interviewed Dick's fellow servicemen, and assembled a photographic record of that chapter in Australia's and America's war history. Craig learned that Dick's fearlessness was admired by his colleagues, as he volunteered for everything, believing that the more he did for the war effort, the sooner the war would be over and he could return home. Dick was an "Odd Bod" because his expertise in radar detection meant that he often flew with different crews.



Craig Bellamy and Dick Dakeyne, 2004.

It was during his research that Craig also discovered how highly Dick was regarded officially by the Americans. From wartime archives, Craig found a letter from American officials planning to bestow one of their highest awards, the **Medal of Freedom**, upon three Australian Air Force servicemen – one of whom was Dick – and four Australian Army servicemen. Dick was never informed and was completely unaware of this. The Australian Government's policy at the time barred Australians from receiving this American award, and it declined the offer on their behalf.



Dick Dakeyne's presentation at the Darwin Aviation Museum, 19th February 2012.
(Photograph: Craig Bellamy.)

On 19th February 2012, the **70th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin** by the Japanese, Craig arranged for Dick to visit Darwin and present a talk at the Australian Aviation Heritage Centre (Darwin Aviation Museum). I attended and was inspired by Dick's account, particularly as it related to northern Australia during the war period. Had he considered writing a book? Dick told me he didn't feel there was enough in it, but when I met Craig, it was obvious there was, and Craig had commenced some drafts of chapters in 2004.

From that time, the three of us have collaborated, drawing on Craig's extensive knowledge and archive, bringing Dick's amazing stories of survival, tragedy and loss, and his sense of adventure and humour to publication. Dick Dakeyne is an Australian living treasure.

For the provision of additional photographs, we would like to thank the following and/or their family members who assisted Craig in his research: Frank Cooper, Ed Crabtree, Glenn Horton, Gordon Sanders, Ted Sturtevant and Errol Suttor. The painting on page 58 was provided courtesy of Drew Harrison. Betty Lum provided assistance with the transcribing of some of the recorded interviews, and Ron Ninnis and Ann Welch provided helpful comments on the draft manuscript.

Dr David M. Welch

Darwin, 2014



Spitfire replica on display in the Australian Aviation Heritage Centre (Darwin Aviation Museum). Manufactured in the United Kingdom, Spitfires provided valuable defence against attacks on the Darwin region. (Photograph: David M. Welch.)



Two US air crews being briefed for one of the longest reconnaissance flights of the war, 2,700 miles.
(Painting by William Edwin Pidgeon, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 25th Dec 1943, page 11.)



Sgt Klovossis, Lt Craig and Capt Oman in the briefing room, Fenton.
(Dick Dakeyne Collection.)

On the 13th August, **Balikpapan**, a major oil-refining town on the East Coast of Borneo, was raided at night by twelve planes. They found the place completely open with all the lights on and the oil refinery working flat out. Balikpapan had been established as a huge oil refinery by Dutch Shell before the war and was captured and taken over by the Japanese in early 1942.

The next day, one plane carried out a recco, took photos, and found the harbour full of boats, so a second night raid was made on the 17th. My crew flew on the second Balikpapan raid on the 17th and the plan was that half our planes were to bomb the refinery and the other half were to bomb shipping. Our allocation was shipping, with our instructions being to fly around the harbour, find the biggest ship, and drop our bombs on it.

This was the first time our bombardier had ever tried skip bombing, let alone at night. We went in very low over that ship and dropped our bombs. The bombs missed – fortunately. If they had hit the target we might have been brought down with the explosion, we flew so low. One of our crews doing the same thing at **Macassar** a month later, hit the ship below them and the explosion took them out, too. We didn't know how dangerous it was. Later they put delayed action fuses in the bombs.

So, from the bombing point of view this trip was a failure, but the RCM results were a success, as I managed to pick up the details of several new radar stations on both the way up and back.



Remains of the pilots' briefing room, Fenton camp.
(Photograph: Craig Bellamy.)



"Half a Ton of Love to Tojo." We normally carried 500 pound bombs, but this time we carried particularly large 1,000 pound bombs.
(Photograph: Dick Dakeyne.)



Official photograph of John Dennis' crew who participated in the bombing mission over Balikpapan, Borneo, flying a B-24 Liberator as part of the 530th Bomb Squadron, 380th Bomb Group, at Fenton Field, Australia, 30th August 1943.

Standing: Captain John S. Dennis of Richmond, Virginia (Pilot); Lt. R.H. Kunz of Minneapolis, Minnesota (Bombardier); 2nd Lt. P.C. Hebner of Warren, Ohio (Navigator); T/Sgt. Lyle R. Hastings of Milesburg, Pennsylvania (Engineer); S/Sgt. Jesse Estes of Montgomery, Alabama (Armorer-gunner).

Front row: T/Sgt. Charles W. Wilbert of Spokane, Washington (Radio Operator); S/Sgt. Chester W. Ostrowski of Toledo, Ohio (Assistant Engineer); S/Sgt. Richard Mather of Hamilton, New Jersey (Waist Gunner); F/Sgt. (RAAF) Richard B. Dakeyne of Sydney, Australia (Waist Gunner).

Three days later I was on the 380th's first trip to **Pomelaa**, a nickel mine in South Celebes. I flew in *Juarez Whistle* as both RCM Operator and belly gunner, but with **Captain Gus Connery's** crew.

We happened to arrive over the target at the same time as a Japanese transport plane, a Nakajima L2D code-named *Tabby*. Our B-24 bomber rapidly converted to a fighter and our top turret gunner, **John ("Jack") Tackett**, shot the transport down. The photograph of the stricken plane with smoke belching from its engines became famous. I have to confess, I felt a bit sorry for the Japs in that plane. How unlucky were they?

