

Chapter 12

Second World War

CRB officers in other Services

*They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

*They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.*

For the Fallen
Laurence Binyon

This chapter includes the stories of other men – and one woman – of the CRB who served in the Second World War but with a non-Australian force – including some who fought with the enemy. Some of them are like adventure stories that you might see in the cinema. Most of them were part of the post-war immigration program from Europe in the 1940s through to the 1960s. This influx of non-British people has had a profound influence on Australia – to many it denotes the birth of multi-cultural Australia.

The immigration program was initiated entirely by selfish motives. Australia was in urgent need of a larger population to rebuild after the war and was desperate to bolster our defence capability. The Chifley Government established a Department of Immigration which aimed to achieve a one per cent annual increase in population. The catch cry was “Populate or perish”. The program was heavily skewed towards migrants from the British Isles. Over four million migrants arrived between 1945 and 1985, of whom about 40 per cent came from Britain and Ireland.

However nearly 200,000 were sponsored by the International Refugee Organisation – which is more than the first wave of migration of convicts transported to Australia in the first 80 years of European settlement. Many of the Eastern Europeans were refugees from the Red Army - and thus mostly anti-Communist - and therefore politically acceptable.

These are their stories.

George de Weerd

The first entry in this chapter does not strictly qualify for an entry in this narrative, in that George did not serve in a military force by choice. George was born in the Netherlands and he was captured by the Germans and forced into hard labour in the deep U-boat facilities along the Dutch coast. These were underground tunnels that provided U-boats with direct access to the North Sea. The work was difficult and George had to work in waist-high water for long periods. George was a tall man who walked with a stooped, shuffling gait. This was caused by his exposure in the freezing water which affected the joints in his back and legs. He related how the enforced workers saved their sugar rations to mix in the concrete being placed. This delayed the setting of the concrete and produced weak concrete.

George and his family migrated to the Warrnambool area in the late 1950s and he joined the CRB as a cost clerk in the early 1960s. He worked firstly for Overseer Yeoman on the reconstruction of the Princes Highway West between Tyrendarra and Heywood.

By all accounts, he was serious and conscientious man and he picked up English on the job. He caught a sulphur-crested cockatoo one day and placed it in a box to take home to his family. When he arrived home from the camp one Friday night his family greeted him excitedly as they peeked into the box. His wife asked if it was a good bird and George announced proudly in his newly acquired English, that the men on the truck thought it was a fucking beauty. The expression lived on in the folklore of Warrnambool Division.

I thought his story throws some light on the efforts of others during war.

Captain Denis W. P. Hayden

Denis was born in India in 1908. He obtained a Diploma of Civil Engineering in 1929 after education at the technical college at Jamalpur (in Bihar State) and further correspondence courses at I.C.S. London. He was also a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

The efficient running of the Indian railways during the Second World War was critical to Allied war effort in South East Asia. The British Empire Forces stationed in Burma were initially supplied through the port of Rangoon, but when the Japanese Army forced the British back to the border with Burma, the railways in India became the only source of supply of materials. They served the extended lines of communication from Calcutta to the frontlines and over the Hump into China. The Hump was the name coined by Allied pilots to the eastern Himalayan mountains which they flew over to China to support the Chinese Army of Chiang Kai-shek and American Air force Units based in China.

Between 1929 and 1958 Denis was employed by the East Indian Railways and he was associated with some very large projects in the railway network. Between 1942 and 1945, he was a Captain in the Indian Engineers Railway Regiment. The regiment was responsible, *inter alia*, for maintaining rail communications and essential rail infrastructure in the forward areas of India, adjacent to the hostilities occurring in Burma. For his service he was awarded the Efficiency Medal. During his period with the East India Railways after the war, he spent four years in Great Britain and Europe

on the inspection and purchasing of rolling stock, machines and structural steel for the Indian Government.

When he migrated to Australia in 1958, he was employed by the CRB as a bridge inspecting engineer. On one occasion, Denis was quoted in a local newspaper as advising the Shire Engineer to close a bridge to traffic stating “*that he would not allow his pet tom cat to cross the structure*”.

He died suddenly at his home in North Balwyn on June 27 1966.

Frank Hopwood

Frank was an English engineer who worked in Dandenong and Asphalt Divisions. He emigrated to Australia aboard the *Iberia* with his wife and two children, in October 1956.

During the Second World War he was an engineer with the British Army and recounted stories about trying to rebuild coastal railway bridges in Italy that had been blown up by the retreating Germans.

The British archives are massive and there were hundreds of entries for ‘Frank Hopwood’ going back to the nineteenth century. However, I think I found the right one because he was the only Frank Hopwood I could find in the Second World War who had served in Italy.

If he is the right one, he served in the Lancashire Fusiliers. The brigade became part of the 1st Infantry Division, which was serving in the Italian Campaign where it took part in the fighting on the Gothic Line, suffering severe casualties.

The Gothic Line was a German line of defence across Italy stretching from Pesaro in the east to north of Pisa in the west. It formed the last major line of defence along the summits of the northern part of the Apennine Mountains during the fighting retreat of the German forces.



The Gothic Line (in red) across Italy.

Using 15,000 slave labourers, the Germans created more than 2,000 well-fortified machine gun nests, observation posts, bunkers and artillery fighting positions to repel any attempt to breach the Gothic Line.



Fortifications of the Gothic Line

The final breaching of the line by American and British troops has been described as the biggest battle ever fought in Italy. Over 1,200,000 men participated in it and it was comparable to the battles of El Alamein and Monte Cassino combined.



Men of the Lancashire Fusiliers riding a Sherman tank into battle during the final Italian offensive, April 1945.

Frank commenced with the Board in Dandenong Division in 1956 and was the Supervising Engineer on the South Gippsland and Bass Highways until his promotion to Asphalt Division in 1968. During his stay in Asphalt, Frank became well known for his keen, mathematical brain (especially with metric conversion) and his interest in maintenance work and equipment and the activities of the Board's patrolmen.

Frank's dry wit and his ability to recall a tale from the past, his accumulated knowledge of 'the black stuff', and his keen interest in developing contrivances to assist in bituminous surfacing technology, endeared him to his colleagues throughout the various divisions of the Board.

I could not find Frank Hopwood's military archive, so this entry cannot be confirmed. It is based on conversations he had with his colleagues in the CRB.

Frank died in June 1974.

Edgar Bernard Kaijak (Kayak)

The information for this entry was mainly obtained from Edgar's son, Horst, who has been always referred to as Ozzie. Ozzie also worked for the CRB/RCA/VicRoads as a civil engineer.

Edgar worked in the Materials Research Division at the CRB as an Experimental Officer. He worked there for nine years before retiring at 65 years. He was born in 1914 in Bolderāja – a suburb of Riga, the capital city of Latvia. Edgar's mother was Danish and spoke German which was the main language in their household. In addition to German, Edgar was also fluent in Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, and Russian – and he also topped up his English skills after his arrival in Australia.



A studio portrait of Edgar Kayak taken in Riga in 1938.

From 1933 to 1935 Edgar undertook compulsory National Service with the Latvian Army. On completion of this service, he started studying at Riga University but the political instability at that time prevented him from continuing. So, in 1936, he commenced training to qualify as a Station Master with the Latvian Railways Board. This board was established in 1919 – taking over the earlier private rail network. During the Second World War, the Latvian railway network was severely damaged: most railway bridges and many station buildings were destroyed, and irreversible damage was caused to the tracks, as well as to the communications and signalling facilities.

In 1938, he married Sigrid Anita Ploegert in Riga. Sigrid's family lived in Fruenburg - now shown on maps as Saldus - outside Riga, and according to Ozzie, her family was comfortably off. Despite her genteel upbringing in Latvia, she became an excellent gardener and cook in Australia.



Station Master Edgar Kayak – circa 1938.

Even before the outbreak of war, Latvia, like its sister Baltic states of Estonia and Lithuania, was easy prey for the European super powers of Russia and Germany. Latvia became an independent state in 1919 following the First World War. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Latvia was annexed by Russia, followed by the invasion by Germany, after which Russia took over again until the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991 leading to the restoration of independence. Over the relatively short span of the Second World War, Latvia came under the control of four separate governments.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) between Russia and Germany was a non-aggression pact that enabled the two powers to partition Poland between them. It also contained a secret protocol which defined the borders of the Russian and German spheres of influence across Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. So, even before the Second World War had started, Germany and Russia were surreptitiously dividing up the spoils of the Baltic region states. Both countries invaded Poland in September 1939. In 1940, Russia annexed parts of Finland and a short while later, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

After the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, most of the Baltic Germans left Latvia by agreement between the Latvian Government and Nazi Germany. In total 50,000 Baltic Germans left by the deadline of December 1939, with about 15,000 choosing to remain in Latvia. Most of those who remained left for Germany in the summer of 1940, when a second resettlement scheme was agreed. They were resettled - mainly in Poland - and given land and businesses in exchange for the money they had received from the sale of their previous assets. Sigrid's family property and businesses were traded in this way during the second resettlement.

In 1940, Edgar and Sigrid were transported to Buk (formerly Buchenstadt) in central Poland but they refused to leave the train believing that settling on land that had been taken from somebody else would have made them third rate citizens. Instead, they went to Germany and were resettled in the town of Verden-an-der Aller – a small town between Bremen and Hanover in Lower Saxony. Here, Edgar gained employment as a draftsman and in 1942 their only child, Ozzie, was born. After Ozzie's birth, Edgar and Sigrid became naturalised German citizens in order to be eligible to receive government rations - otherwise, they would have starved. They were tattooed under their armpits to prove their citizenship, including their blood group.

In 1943, Edgar was drafted into the Wehrmacht. He was stationed in the industrial city of Bremen in an anti-aircraft defensive battery. He served there until the end of the war in 1945. Bremen and its nearby sister city of Bremerhaven were important to the German war effort because of their manufacturing facilities, port and railway hubs, the shipping industry, and the large sub-marine pens and shelters. Consequently, they came under constant bombardment by Allied air forces. On 25 April 1944 they surrendered. Edgar said that they simply ran out of ammunition and they laid down their arms to the British 3rd Infantry Division that overran them. A few weeks later, on 7 May 1945, Germany unconditionally surrendered to the Allies in Reims, France – thus bringing an end to the Second World War.

Bremen and Bremerhaven surrendered about eight days after Verden-an-der Aller and Edgar and his comrades were loaded into a truck for transportation to a Prisoner of War camp in Belgium. Edgar was able to write a secret note to Sigrid which he wrapped around a stone and as they drove through Verden-an-der Aller he was able to throw it on to the footpath outside his house to let Sigrid know he was still alive. Edgar remained in captivity in Belgium until his release in 1946. It took all this time for the Allied forces to sift through all the prisoners, mainly to establish whether Nazis or communists were within their midst.

In 1948, Edgar graduated as *Hoch* and *Tiefbau* (structural and civil engineer) from the Bremen Freistadt Technische Hochschule under a British retraining scheme for demobilised German soldiers. As is the entry requirement of many universities in Europe, students were required to develop skills in an apprenticeship or another field of enterprise (such as languages) and Edgar chose bricklaying – which was to become very important for him later in life. Ozzie told me that Erwin Matzner – whose experience is described later in this chapter - chose book-binding as his additional skill.

More than 200,000 Latvian citizens died during the Second World War, including approximately 75,000 Latvian Jews murdered during the Nazi occupation. Latvian soldiers fought on both sides of the conflict, mainly on the German side, with 140,000 men in the Latvian Legion of the Waffen-SS. The Red Army formed a Latvian Rifle Division in 1944, and on some occasions opposing Latvian troops faced each other in battle.



A photograph taken near Ozzie's home in Verden-an-der Aller of Allied soldiers with German POWs – 1945.

Although he was only three when the war ended, Ozzie has some memories of the war – of hiding in the basement during the aerial bombing and catching the fear of the women comforting him. His house was hit twice. He said he waved to the Allied planes flying overhead but stopped after his house was hit for the second time. He also vaguely remembered the Allied occupation of his town, and the white sheets draped out of the windows to signify Verden-an-der Aller's surrender – although he admits that this may be a false memory.

Ozzie can also remember scavenging with his mother for coal along the railway lines and potatoes from the fields after the guards disappeared. The cold and starvation are etched deep in his memory. His mother did not want him to attend school in Verden-an-der Aller, so she and Ozzie shifted to Offenbach, now a suburb of Frankfurt to join Sigrid's sister.



Ozzie at his school in Frankfurt – 1949.

In 1950, Ozzie's family began their journey to migrate from Germany to Australia. Their fares had been paid by Sigrid's sister and brother-in-law (living at the time in the Bonegilla camp in Northern Victoria), who had arrived in Australia in 1948 as Latvian displaced persons. Edgar and his family sailed to Australia aboard the SS *Sebastiano Caboto* - departing from Genoa in Italy. When they first touched land in Australia at Fremantle, they walked ashore to the nearest hotel to celebrate. They

arrived in Melbourne on 6 February 1951 and were immediately driven to their first residence in Hughesdale.

Ozzie was mocked on his first day at Hughesdale Primary School. He was dressed as any German schoolboy was dressed – lederhosen, shorts, long white socks and sandals. He could not speak a word of English. However, he soon learnt to cope. Scouts played an important role. It introduced him to the outdoor life of Australia and skiing was another activity which he took up with a passion.

In 1958, Edgar changed his name by deed poll from Kaijak, to Kayak. There is no letter ‘y’ in the Latvian language but the ‘ij’ in his name was pronounced ‘y’.

Edgar’s engineering qualifications were not recognised in Australia so he called upon his bricklaying skills. He built houses for the Victorian Housing Commission as an independent contractor but when he was about 55, osteoarthritis set in and he had to seek less strenuous work. This was when he joined the Materials Research Laboratory in the CRB Headquarters at Kew. He retired in 1975 and died in the Kiandra Aged Care Home in December 1996 at 82 years of age.

In 1960, at McKinnon High School, Ozzie was awarded a cadetship by the CRB and, after graduation from the University of Melbourne, he worked as a bridge design engineer for about 20 years culminating in his appointment as the Senior Design Engineer for the elevated section of the West Gate Freeway, South Melbourne. He then transferred to Advance Planning Division for four years before joining the Victorian Railways on the High Speed Rail Project. In 1991 he joined the Victorian Strategic Transport Study at Melbourne University and he remained with that group when it was transferred to RMIT University.



Ozzie and Edgar Kayak at Ozzie's graduation in 1965.

Edgar died in Sydney in December 1996.

Flight Sergeant Zygfryd Piotr (Peter) Kozeił BEM OAM - RAF Service No. 708536

Peter Kozeił (Kozeill) worked in the Procurement Section of Bridge Branch at the CRB.

His war was remarkable – more like a plot for a movie than real life. Born in Kowel, Poland, in 1926, he was a 13-year-old military cadet when war broke out in 1939. When Germany invaded Poland, he became separated from his parents and was arrested by the Soviets trying to cross the border into Russia and he was sentenced to two years imprisonment in a Ukrainian camp. In 1941 the inmates were being transported from the camp to escape the invading Nazis, and the column was strafed by German planes and Peter grasped the opportunity to escape. He was just 15. He began a perilous journey across war torn Russia – jumping trains and attaching himself to travelling families, and he finally arrived at the border with Uzbekistan.

Trying to cross into Afghanistan, he was captured by Kazakh bounty hunters. On the way to Tashkent in Uzbekistan, he escaped again and joined a Polish Army Brigade which Stalin had begrudgingly allowed to form. He was sent to the Middle East where he almost died with typhoid in Iran. Somehow, he managed to escape or was sent to England where he trained as an air gunner

rising to the rank of Flight Sergeant in the Royal Air Force. He flew more than 60 missions over Europe. Over 17,000 Polish airmen served in Great Britain during the war.



Flight Sergeant Peter Koziell, Polish Air Force.

He applied to migrate to the USA but, because of delays, he came to Australia with 60 Polish airmen. On the incoming passenger list his age was quoted as 21 and his occupation as a labourer. In fact, everyone on the list was Polish and they were all bound for Tasmania. He arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Asturias* on 9 December 1947 via Algeria, Malta, Suez, Aden and Colombo. Peter worked for the Tasmania Hydroelectric Authority for a number of years – to pay off the bond he undertook – and he then shifted to Melbourne. He became a naturalized Australian in 1949.

He started work as a clerk at the CRB and his office became the unofficial Polish Embassy in Australia where he continued his service to the Polish community. He was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1979, the Order of Australia in 1987, the Polish Gold and Silver Crosses of Merit, and the Order of Polonia Restituta – Poland's highest award. The Polish awards were made in London by the Polish Government.

After the war, Peter became involved in assisting Polish servicemen – a task he maintained all his life. In 1952 he was elected President of the Polish Airforce Association and he held that post for

over 25 years. He also assisted Polish seamen to defect to Australia after arriving in Melbourne by ship. Using a small boat standing alongside the ship and a loud speaker, he urged anyone who wanted to defect to jump overboard – and many did. In 1981, 13 crewmen of the Polish cargo ship *Artur Grottger* defected and sought political asylum in Australia – although only one of them was assisted by Peter. The other 12 defected in Sydney.



Peter Koziell – 1979.

Peter also assisted newly arrived Polish settlers in Australia. He assisted them in weddings, funerals, family problems, housing and employment. He also organised Polish sports festivals and folk dancing competitions, as well as organising and funding the Polish youth camp, ‘Polana’.

Peter died in October 2006 and is buried in Warsaw.



Peter’s grave at the airmen’s cemetery in Warsaw.

Flying Officer Patricia (Pat) Mary Marr, 2033299, WAAF

Pat is the only woman in the CRB that I have found so far to have served – but it is likely there were others. She was married but emigrated to Australia alone, arriving at Melbourne on 13 November 1961 aboard the *Iberia*. Her address was given as 13 Cartwright Street, Glenroy, Melbourne. She may have been joining her husband – or she may have been widowed or separated.

Pat joined the RAF in 1941. She remained in the Air Force after the war. I found her name in the Supplement to the London Gazette, 31 May 1949, promulgating her promotion to Flying Officer.

She was the Plan Filing Clerk at the CRB responsible for the management of the organisation's plans at Head Office. These included, *inter alia*, military maps and aerial photographs. However, during the Second World War, Pat had a far more urgent involvement with military maps and aerial photographs.

Noel Anderson (see Chapter 7) was a close colleague. His recollection was that Pat was a Flying Officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and during the war she was engaged in interpreting aerial photographs identifying targets such as the launching pads for the V1 and V2 rocket bombs used by the Germans during the blitz of London. These bombs – called 'buzz bombs' – were first launched in June 1944. Over 6,000 were launched at Britain; 2,340 hit London causing 5,500 deaths and 16,000 injuries.

WAAFs did not serve as aircrew. The use of women pilots was limited to the Air Transport Auxiliary, which was civilian. Although they did not participate in active combat, they were exposed to the same dangers as any on the home front working at military installations. They were active in parachute packing and the crewing of barrage balloons in addition to performing meteorological, radar, aircraft maintenance, transport and communications duties - including wireless and telegraphic operations. They worked with codes and ciphers, performed intelligence operations and analysed reconnaissance photographs. WAAFs were a vital presence in the control of aircraft, both in radar stations and as plotters in operation rooms, most notably during the Battle

of Britain. These operation rooms directed fighter aircraft against the Luftwaffe, mapping both home and enemy aircraft positions.



WAAFs in the operations room during the Battle of Britain.

Glyn Jones – once the Bridge Engineer in Warrnambool Division – remembers conversations he had with her. He said she made a valuable contribution to British intelligence during the war. She enthralled him with some of her experiences but she didn't discuss details because of 'secret and confidential' protocols which still prevailed after the war.

She told Glyn that her proudest achievement was the discovery of the V2 sites at Peenemünde when little was known where they were. A WAAF named Constance Babington Smith was credited mainly with the discovery but Pat assured him that Babington Smith was only part of the team who should have been given more recognition for their success. This work involved interpretation of photo reconnaissance from special camera equipped fighter planes.

Constance Babington Smith became a British writer and journalist after the war but she is best known for her wartime work in imagery intelligence. She was born into English nobility and her knowledge of aircraft took her into the WAAF. In April 1943, her unit in the Allied Photographic

Intelligence Unit, was briefed by the Air Ministry to be on the look-out for a long-range gun, remotely controlled rocket aircraft and 'some sort of tube out of which a rocket could be squirted' and 'anything queer'.

Peenemünde was the site of a German research station on the Baltic Sea. Allied photographic reconnaissance from the air had indicated unusual activities there, possibly the construction of earthworks for testing rockets. In June 1943, one of Babington Smith's fellow interpreters made the first identification of two V2 long range rockets lying horizontally on road vehicles at Peenemünde.



1943 RAF photo reconnaissance picture of the Peenemünde Army Research Centre on the Baltic coast of Germany

Examining a photograph taken on June 23 1943 they spotted 'four little tail-less aeroplanes taking the air' which 'looked queer enough to satisfy anybody'. What they had seen, it turned out, were four Me 163 liquid rocket fighters. V2 long range rockets were identified from photographs of Peenemünde for the first time that month.

On November 13 1943, they were asked to look out for aircraft at Peenemünde which might be pilotless. Their search was under way when on November 28 a de Havilland Mosquito returned with a sensational photograph. As Babington Smith studied it through her stereoscope, she identified a ramp holding a tiny cruciform shape on rails. Her discovery, together with the

subsequent examination of many thousands of photographs of other possible launch sites and storage depots, indicated that a flying bomb offensive was being prepared on the other side of the Channel.

The bombing of the launch sites was given urgent priority, under the codename 'Crossbow'. Babington Smith's unit had the task of providing photographic material to assist targeting by Bomber Command and its Pathfinder Force, and at the end of 1943 Allied air forces flattened the known launch sites.

Operation Crossbow is a compelling example of how critical the work of the reconnaissance squadrons and the photographic interpretation unit at RAF Medmenham was to the outcome of the war. The imagery taken then shows the extent of the search for test and launch sites, which involved taking over 1.2 million aerial photographs, the great efforts made by the Germans to camouflage the sites, and the dramatic response of the Allied air forces when targets were pinpointed.

Without this photographic intelligence, which was created at remarkable speed, the Germans could have launched potentially devastating attacks on Britain before D-Day that could have changed the outcome of the war.

But by the spring of 1944, the Germans had built less obvious emplacements in the Pas de Calais and in June Hitler unleashed the V1 assault on London and the south of England. The V2s began to fall on London in September.



A V1 flying bomb.

In the meantime, the unit had been pursuing another vital brief - watching out for new types of aircraft, especially jets. When Group Captain Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine, paid them a visit, he was much impressed by what they had found - notably the Me 163, He 280 and Me 262.

By 1945, the aircraft recognition section (L Section) had eleven staff – one of whom was Pat Marr.

To say that Pat supervised the Plan Filing Room is an understatement. She operated it with rigid efficiency and, consequently, earned the respect of draftsmen/draftswomen and engineers alike. The room was located on the Lower Ground Floor at Head Office. Once it was inundated with nine inches of rainwater following a heavy downpour. About 1,000 maps and statfiles became saturated but Pat saved them all with plastic and blotting paper spreading them out in the Theatrette on the Ground Floor. After her retirement, she threatened to write a book about her experiences working at the CRB. She said she would call it “Murder in the Plan Filing Room”.



Pat Marr on her retirement day – 1980.

Pat was a stalwart of the CRB’s Drama Group who used to put on plays in the Head Office theatrette. Apparently, she had done a lot of work in the film industry in England and her role was usually behind the scenes as a director.

Pat died in June 2021. She requested that each person attending her funeral should bring a single flower.

Erwin Josef Matzner-Levi

Erwin was my first boss in Bridge Design Division. I was fortunate to know him. He was a very gentle and unassuming man, spoke nine languages fluently and was a talented cellist. The languages he spoke included the main Eastern European ones (including Russian) as well as French, German, Italian and English. His death certificate described him as engineer and teacher and this is very apt – he taught me more about bridge design, as my first mentor, than anyone else. He was, in my view, an outstanding designer. He had textbooks in Serbian, Russian and German and, like many European engineers, often used graphical design methods.



Erwin Matzner in 1978 – two years after his retirement.

Erwin was Jewish and he was always known at the CRB as Erwin Matzner – not Matzner-Levi. However, I visited his grave in the Boroondara Cemetery in Kew and saw that his name was in fact, Matzner-Levi.

Erwin had a peripatetic family history – possibly due to his Jewish heritage. His parents, Bruno and Irma were born in Zakynthos in Greece. Bruno and Irma migrated to Poland and then to Rijeka in Croatia.



Irma and Bruno (Erwin's parents) on the left and Irma's parents on the right.

This photo was taken in 1915 – the year of Erwin's birth.

In a book written by J. Romano entitled *Jews of Yugoslavia 1941-1945. Victims of genocide and participants in the national liberation war*, Belgrade, 1980, the following entry – translated from Croatian to English - was included:

Matzner, Ervin¹, revolutionary (Rijeka², January 15 1915 - 1998). Son of Bruno and Irma b. Levi. He moved to Croatia in 1931 with his family from Andrychow, Poland, where his father worked as a clerk in the cement industry. After the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, he was a technical student in Zagreb. He joined the partisans in 1943 as a fighter in the units of the 26th Dalmatian Division.

From records held by his family, Erwin's father, rather than being a clerk in the cement industry, was involved in brick manufacturing in Poland – perhaps the owner of a factory - and his family were quite wealthy. In Poland during the 1930s, the Jewish population was around 3 million people – or about 10 per cent of the total population – which was the highest percentage of Jews in any

¹ His grave spells his name as Erwin – as I always knew it.

² Rijeka is a Croatian port city on Kvarner Bay in the northern Adriatic Sea. It's known as the gateway to Croatia's islands.

European country. This time in history also saw the rise of antisemitism to alarming levels. As an example, William Hagen of the University of California, described the following incident:

In Polish Christian students' brutal 1931 attack at Wilno University on Jewish fellow-students, one of the antisemites' demands was that Jewish medical students dissect "Jewish corpses" only. Natalia Aleksinn assigns this macabre issue an "instrumental character," that is, as a tactic to achieve the university's "dejudaiization."

It was probably the rise of antisemitism that drove the family to move from Poland to Croatia in 1931 when Erwin was 16 years old. Erwin had two sisters, Thea and Edith. There is a family story that Erwin was urged to take up an apprenticeship as a roofer in Croatia – which he may have done – but he eventually commenced his engineering studies at Zagreb University. He was a student there in 1941 when Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy occupied the area and installed a puppet state named the Independent State of Croatia. It extended beyond the boundaries of Croatia and included Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With the support of Germany and Italy, the new regime introduced racial laws and launched a genocide campaign against the Serbs, Jews and Roma (gypsies). Many people were imprisoned in concentration camps. At the same time, the Yugoslav Royalist and Serbian nationalist Chetniks conducted a genocidal campaign against Croats and Muslims.

As a young man, Erwin developed a lice infection on his back and this event inadvertently saved his life. Lice infestation, also known as pediculosis, refers to an infection caused by small, wingless insects that live on the human body. These lice live in clothing and bedding, crawling onto the skin to feed. They can cause intense itching and visible bite marks, especially around the waist, groin, and upper thighs. He was treated by an American doctor who removed Erwin from his place of residence to treat him at a hospital or clinic. After successful treatment, Erwin returned only to learn that everyone else there had disappeared – possibly pressed into military service with the German Army or transported to a concentration camp or, worst of all, executed. Whatever, Erwin never heard of any of them again.

Erwin's parents were transported to a concentration camp and neither survived. His mother, Irma, was brutally murdered in 1944 in the Jasenovac concentration and extermination camp in Croatia. The concentration camp was established and operated by the governing Ustase regime, Europe's only Nazi collaborating regime that operated its own extermination camps for Serbs, Romani, Jews, and political dissidents. It quickly grew into the third largest concentration camp in Europe.

About 100,000 people were killed there between 1941 and 1945. It is estimated that 25,000 members of Croatia's Jewish population, out of a total of 37,000, died there.

The manner of Irma's death is so harrowing I have chosen not to describe it. Erwin's father, Bruno, also died (in 1943) but it is not certain where he was incarcerated. His name appears on a roll of victims of the camps in Croatia, but the location is not specified.

Erwin joined the partisan resistance in 1943 and served in the 26th Dalmatian Division. This was a Yugoslav Partisan division formed in October 1943. It mostly operated in Southern Dalmatia where it fought against parts of the 2nd Panzer Army, 118th Jäger Division, 7th SS Division, and the 369th Infantry Division. Until the end of 1943, the 26th Division fought defensive operations in Makarska on the Peljesac Peninsula and on Korcula Island - against German forces advancing into Dalmatia after the capitulation of Italy. By 1944 only Vis Island remained unoccupied and the Division's main task was to prepare a defence for the anticipated German invasion – which was eventually cancelled. Vis was turned into large naval-air base for the Yugoslav Partisans and the Allies.

The 26th Dalmatian Division also carried out several seaborne landings on Dalmatian islands either alone or jointly with Allied British and American Commandos. In the final battles of the war, the division liberated Bihac, Gospic, Senj and Krk Islands and was also involved in battles near Klana and Ilirska Bistrica.

Erwin did not talk about his wartime experiences but he told me once that, when local engineers in Croatia were captured by the German army, they were put to work by the Germans repairing bridges bombed by the Allied forces. To overcome sabotage, once a bridge was repaired, the Germans tied all the engineers and other workers to the bridge, and then they test loaded the bridge. If the bridge failed, everyone went down with it. I contacted the Jewish Biographical Lexicon in Croatia to see if they might have more information but there was no response.

After the war, Erwin lived in Trieste – a major port which is located on a narrow strip of Italian territory between the Adriatic Sea and Slovenia. When Erwin lived there, Trieste was a hot bed of intrigue between Allied and Yugoslav forces. It was divided by what was called the Morgan Line dividing Anglo-American and Yugoslav military administrations. This situation continued until

1947 when the Paris Peace Treaty established a unified Free Territory of Trieste – which is now part of Italy.

Erwin lived on the Yugoslav side of the border which ran through the city but he often crossed it mainly because the market was better on the other side. There, he met a young Italian woman, Zlata Ana, and they married in 1947. Zlata came from a strict Catholic family who disowned her because she married a Jew – even though Erwin was Jewish only by birth and was not devout. Their daughter, was raised as a Catholic. They applied to come to Australia but the red tape was too much for them and so they decided to go to Israel. Family tradition has it that they were sponsored to go to Israel by the Israeli Government.

This was soon after the creation of Israel as a new state in 1948, and I expect there would have been a great need for engineers to build the infrastructure of the country. Erwin worked in the roads sector and often slept in a tent when out on site. Their daughter, Iris, was born there in 1953. They were eventually successful in obtaining sponsorship to come to Australia. A lady called Edith Buller sponsored them. Edith came from Croatia and she went to school with Erwin's sister, Thea.

Erwin, Zlata Ana, and their two-year-old daughter, Iris, arrived in Fremantle in May 1955 aboard the *Australia*. Erwin's entire career in Australia was as a Senior Bridge Design Engineer with the Country Roads Board. He also taught Serbo-Croatian language at the University of Melbourne as well as teaching the cello to private students.

Erwin retired in 1976 after 20 years of bridge design, to concentrate on his beloved cello. He also taught cello at a number of private girls' schools and his passionate interest in music was passed on to Iris who played violin in a number of orchestras in Melbourne.

I feel I had a special relationship with Erwin – and perhaps he with me. When I was working for him around 1962, he asked me if I would take Iris to an evening at the Melbourne Film Festival which I was very pleased to do.

He died on 4 June 1998. Since writing these memories, I have come to realize how much I loved and respected him. I lost touch with him after he retired and that was my loss. I am ashamed that I neglected him but I take comfort in stopping at his grave to place a stone on it – as is Jewish custom - and to remember him - on my frequent walks through the Boroondara Cemetery. His

family noticed the accumulation of stones on his headstone and one day, I noticed that they had been swept away – so I knew his family was keeping an eye on Erwin, Zlata and Iris, who are all buried in the same plot.

It was pure happenstance when I was connected to Iris' partner, Steve Whitehead, and his granddaughter, Ilesha Haywood, to get a much fuller picture of this remarkable man. Steve's sister, Georgina, is a friend and ex-colleague of my wife. Ilesha has generously provided me with much of the information contained in this story about Erwin.

He had a huge influence on my engineering career and I count myself extremely fortunate to have known him.

William (Bill) Norris

Bill served aboard the HMS *Ark Royal*.

HMS *Ark Royal* was an aircraft carrier of the Royal Navy that served during the Second World War. Her design differed from previous aircraft carriers. *Ark Royal* was the first ship on which the hangars and flight deck were an integral part of the hull, instead of an add-on or part of the superstructure. Designed to carry a large number of aircraft, she had two hangar deck levels. She was used during a period that first saw the extensive use of naval air power - several carrier tactics were developed and refined aboard *Ark Royal*.

Ark Royal operated in some of the most active naval theatres of the Second World War. She was involved in the first aerial U-boat kills of the war, operations off Norway, the search for the German battleship *Bismarck*, and the Malta Convoys. *Ark Royal* survived several near misses and gained a reputation as a 'lucky ship'. She was torpedoed on 13 November 1941 by the German submarine *U-81* and sank the following day. Only one of her 1,488 crew members was killed. Her sinking was the subject of several inquiries, with investigators keen to know how the carrier was lost in spite of efforts to save the ship and tow her to the naval base at Gibraltar. They found that several design flaws contributed to the loss, which were rectified in new British carriers.



HMS Ark Royal shown with a severe list while sinking after being torpedoed by the German U-boat U 81 off Gibraltar, 14th November, 1941.

The wreck was discovered in December 2002 by an American underwater survey company using sonar mounted on an autonomous underwater vehicle, at a depth of about 1,000 metres (3,300 ft) and approximately 30 nautical miles (56 km; 35 m) from Gibraltar.

Bill escaped the ship through a port hole and he served the rest of the war on submarines.

In the Supplement to the London Gazette of 31 March 1942, a Mention in Despatches was made to Stoker Petty Officer Charles William Norris, P/KX.8I034. I don't know if this is our Bill Norris.



HMS Ark Royal and her air group.

Bill was a fitter at the Plant Branch at Glen Waverley where he worked on a wide range of equipment including complex line marking and road marking machinery. He retired from the Road Construction Authority in 1987 after 20 years of service.



Bill Norris at his retirement in 1987.

Bill was twice married. He married Barbara May Angell in 1944 and Mabel Cullen in 1947.

I could find no record of his death.

Elemer Nyoeeger

Elemer was a Scientific Officer in the Materials Division. He was born in Mindszent – an area of Miskolcz in Hungary - in December 1921.

He was born into a family with a history of Hungarian military service. At around the age of 15 - about 1936 - he became a student at the *The Royal Hungarian Ludovica Defense Academy* (Military Academy) which was the tradition for sons of the family into which he was born. Upon graduation from the Academy, he became an officer in the Hungarian Cavalry - a force with proud and highly famed traditions.

When Germany invaded Hungary, Elemer's family had to bury their valuables and let their horses go to save them from the Nazis. As a Cavalry Officer he was pressed in to the German Army and took part in the Axis invasion of Russia. This led him deep into Russia and ultimately, a long retreat back into Eastern Europe when the Germans were forced back by a reinvigorated Russian army.

Elemer did not often speak of his war experiences but one story concerning the Russian advance he did mention. His unit was right at the front of the advance and the resistance against them was practically non-existent. Word went around the lines that it would be “breakfast in Moscow tomorrow” then suddenly, as he said, “All Hell broke loose” and he and his troops did not stop running for a fortnight. Elemer knowing that his war was at an end took considerable care to make sure he and his men were captured by the American forces. He knew full well that capture by the Russians might have seen him dispatched to a gulag and a short or long lifetime in Siberia.

He and his wife, Maria, became displaced persons and they left Salzburg in July 1949 for a resettlement camp at Naples in Italy from where they embarked for Australia aboard the *Skaugum*. Elemer initially found work as a clerical officer with the Victoria Police in the Motor Registration Branch. In January 1960, Elemer joined the CRB as an experimental officer in the Materials

Research Division while studying Geology at RMIT. He completed his Geology Diploma in 1961 and transferred to the Geology Section.

He was the first petrologist in the CRB and was also a lecturer in petrology at RMIT.



Elemer Nyoeeger – circa 1960s.

Elemer died in Melbourne in February 2011.

Antons (Anton) Pommers

Anton was born in Riga, Latvia in 1927. During his childhood and youth, the Republic of Latvia went through troubled times. Latvia had declared independence from Russia in the aftermath of the First World War. However, by the 1930s, the country became increasingly autocratic after a coup in 1934 which established an authoritarian regime under the leadership of Karlis Ulmanis. The country's *de facto* independence was interrupted at the outset of the Second World War, beginning with Latvia's forcible incorporation into the Soviet Union. This was followed by the invasion and occupation by Nazi Germany in 1941, and the re-occupation by the Soviets in 1944 to form the Latvian SSR for the next fifty years.

Anton attended the Latvian High School Blomberg in Germany.



Anton as a young – circa 1940s.

Although Anton was reluctant to talk about his experiences during the war, he did describe his dilemma when he had to choose between joining the Hitler Youth or likely death at the hands of the Russian army advancing on Latvia. He chose to join Hitler Youth to escape the Red Army. He was sent to Czechoslovakia and from there, he and others escaped and made their way across Europe towards the west where they were hoping to meet the advancing Allied forces. This must have been a harrowing experience – avoiding capture and fossicking for food. Anton once described killing a deer and hiding it in an outhouse so that they could retrieve it after dark. They were successful in being captured by the British and American forces. Anton was very emotionally affected in recalling these times and his relief and gratitude to be in Australia to enjoy peace and freedom and a way of life so different to his earlier experience, was palpable.

The last time he saw his mother, she had pleaded with him to get as far away as possible from Europe and he took this advice by migrating to Australia in 1948 – at the age of 21. He never saw his family again.

He was initially posted to Bonegilla camp and later enrolled at RMIT to study part time for a Diploma in Civil Engineering. He so excelled in maths that RMIT invited him to stay on as a tutor/lecturer.

He married Irena Wenclawowicz in 1950 – they met on the ship coming out to Australia. However, they divorced and Anton married again to Margaret with whom they had three children.



Anton and Margaret – date unknown.

He later joined the CRB and became involved in the development of the Mechanical Sub-branch depot in Glen Waverley. In March 1960, he joined a small task force established under the guidance of Neil Guerin to form the ‘Location’ element of the ‘Traffic and Location’ section. Their task was to identify and locate future freeway alignments outside the inner metropolitan area which was then controlled by the MMBW. Its mandate was to plan for at least 30 years ahead and to consider the following 20 years. It would be difficult to find a freeway in Victoria where Anton had not had some influence.

Anton was co-opted into the Ministry of Transport in the 1980s to work on the METRAS study - the Arterial Road Strategy for Melbourne. He retired from there when he turned 65. He died on 10 September at the age of 90. Anton was a quiet, refined man with impeccable manners and a quiet confidence in his perception and understanding of road planning and traffic engineering. He loved music and he played the cello. He was also an accomplished artist.

He died in Melbourne in September 2017.

Flight Sergeant Clive E. William (Bill) Porritt, 1686292, RAFVR

Bill, the son of a professional piano tuner, was the Personal Assistant to the Chairman of the CRB. He was born in England – in Yorkshire - and served in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve during the Second World War.

At the outbreak of war in September 1939, the RAFVR comprised over 6,500 pilots, 1,600 observers and 2,000 wireless operators. During the war, the Air Ministry used the RAFVR as the principal means of entry for aircrew to serve with the RAF. All those called up for Air Force Service with the RAF, both commissioned officers and other ranks, did so as members of the RAFVR. By the end of 1941 more than half of Bomber Command aircrew were members of the RAFVR.

Bill was attached to 521 Squadron and he was awarded the King's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air in June 1946. This medal is awarded for an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying, though not in active operations against the enemy. He was a Flight Sergeant.

521 Squadron was a meteorological observation unit operating out of Norfolk. A meteorological squadron was first formed in 1941 as part of RAF Bomber Command. It took part in Coastal Command's meteorological operations. The squadron had inherited aircraft such as Gloster Gladiator biplanes and some Hawker Hurricanes. The Squadron gathered meteorological information for weather forecasting – previously provided by merchant shipping.

Gladiator biplanes were used for local weather reporting. Twin-engined Hudsons and Blenheims were used over the North Sea and faster Supermarine Spitfires and Mosquitoes were used for flights over German occupied Europe to assess weather conditions over target areas for the bombers. Later they inherited Hampden bombers - no longer needed by Bomber Command – and B17 Flying Fortresses.

The Squadron was mainly involved in two types of sorties. Temperature and humidity sorties were local and short range, usually performed by Gladiators and Hurricanes climbing to 24,000 feet.

The second type were long range sorties landing initially in Scotland. They flew a triangular route with a turning point off the south west coast of Norway, with a flight time of five hours operating at sea level to 18,000 feet. These were performed by Hudsons and Flying Fortresses.



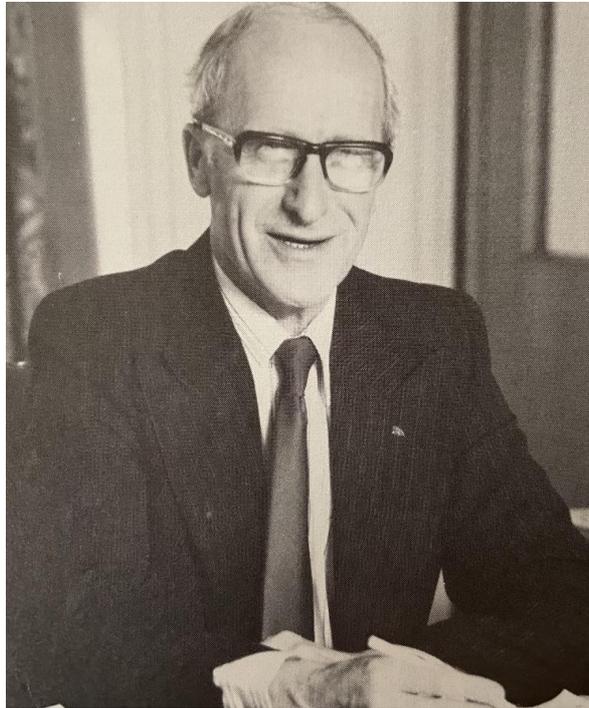
A Gloster Gladiator in RAF markings.

In the early 1960s, Harry George (Deputy Chief Engineer) visited England and recruited Bill to bring his family to Melbourne and work for the CRB. With his wife Molly and their children John, Angela and Clive, they settled in Mentone and a few years later they moved into a new home in Burwood. Bill first started in Dandenong Division (as Assistant to the Divisional Engineer) but was soon appointed the Personal Assistant to the Chairman with a staff of three administration officers and three typists. He excelled in this position. He was loved by everyone - diplomatic, unruffled and efficient. But most of all, he had a wry sense of humour.



Bill Porritt – 1966.

Bill's attention to detail was remarkable. He was unflappable. Bill Thomas (ex-Works Engineer) recalled the panic that occurred back in the '60s and '70s when a Minister made an enquiry that had to be answered yesterday. Everyone ran around like the proverbial headless chooks but Bill Porritt would calmly listen to all that was said and then compose a perfectly worded response.



Bill Porritt – just before his retirement in 1984.

Bill retired from the CRB in 1984 and joined a Melbourne firm of engineers and planners, WBCM. He worked with them until about 1996 organising Australia's annual infrastructure industry Expo, Civinex.

Sadly, Molly died at a young age and Bill missed her terribly. He developed laryngeal cancer and, as a result, his larynx was removed. He spoke with the aid of an electrolarynx. He was quite clearly sensitive about this and it severely affected his quality of life in his later years.

Bill was a member of the committee of the VicRoads Association and was Honorary Secretary for many years. He was a remarkable and memorable character, much loved by his colleagues.

Bill died in 2016 well into his nineties.

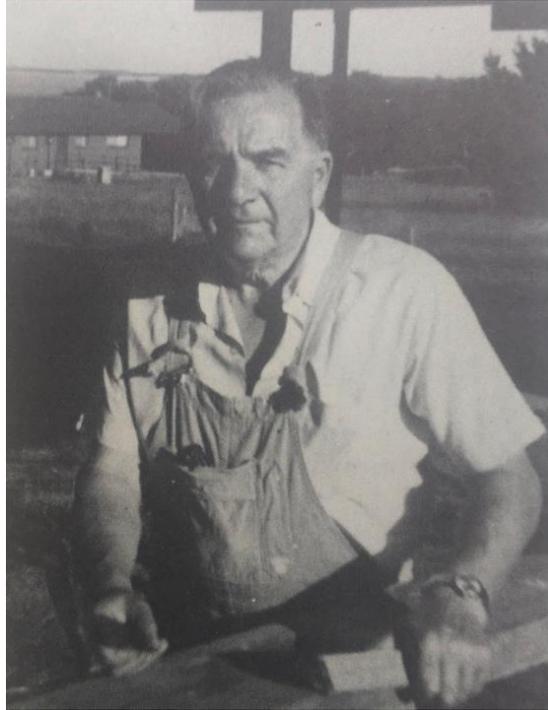
Harry Stafford ISM

In 1978, Harry Stafford was awarded an Imperial Service Medal in recognition of 28 years of service with the Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) and the CRB.

Harry retired from the CRB in 1977. He was born in England and served in the RAF for five and a half years. I have found the names of two men called Harry Stafford who served in the RAF – Service numbers 1036807 and 1026678 – but I have not been able to open their files.

Harry emigrated to Australia aboard the SS *Empire Brent* in 1949 and joined the MMBW as a carpenter and was sent to the Upper Yarra Dam project. His active participation in returned servicemen's affairs, youth and sport played an important part in the day to day lives of all members of this isolated community.

When Harry was transferred back to Melbourne he was engaged in the construction of a number of major sewerage and water supply projects. In 1960 he transferred to the newly-formed Highways Division of the MMBW and was engaged on the first stage of the South Eastern Freeway (now the Monash Freeway) which was opened in 1962. He was also involved in the extension of that freeway and the Tullamarine Freeway. When works commenced on the Eastern Freeway in 1970, Harry was appointed Works Supervisor. He continued his work on the Eastern Freeway up to his retirement.



Harry Stafford.

The Imperial Service medal is presented to selected civil servants for meritorious service, upon their retirement. It is primarily an award for manual and administrative-grade civil servants.

There is a record of Harry Stafford dying in 1986 but I am not sure that it is our Harry.

Lieutenant James (Jim) Symons, 3133064, 258840

Jim was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in June 1918. His father had served as a Sub Lieutenant on HMS *Manxman* in the Royal Navy during the First World War and died of tuberculosis - contracted during his war service - when Jim was eight years old. Prior to his father's death, in 1923, the family emigrated to the USA, but his father's failing health prompted their return to Scotland where they had better support from their family. After his father's death, Jim lived with his widowed mother, brother and two sisters in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute in Scotland. Jim and a young friend built a sea-going, two-person canoe in which they circumnavigated the island - a distance of over 50 kms. This was hailed as an admirable feat at the time, and an article about their exploit was written in the local island newspaper, "*The Buteman*". Jim must have had a love of the water because later he qualified for the Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society.

It was on the Isle of Bute that James was to meet his future wife, Nance Wilson, when they were both on leave from the military during the Second World War.



James (Jim) Symons – circa 1967.

Jim started school in September 1923 at the Rothesay Academy before the family emigrated to the USA a month later. In America, he attended primary school in Syracuse which is a city in New York State near Lake Ontario but he resumed at the Rothesay Academy when his family returned to Scotland in 1926. He completed his primary and secondary education obtaining his Leaving Certificate in 1935 with passes which met the requirements for a 'Certificate of Fitness to enter a Scottish University'.

Jim's civil engineering technical education was undertaken through correspondence schools. This decision was most likely taken so that he could work to earn money to help support his widowed mother and his siblings. In 1936, he commenced working with the Royal Burgh of Rothesay as part of an engineering apprenticeship while, at the same time, studying civil engineering by correspondence with Trevor W. Phillips, 50 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London. This was a great grounding for Jim as he was able to gain valuable practical experience in all aspects of roads, surveying, sewerage and water supply, housing, and harbour works. His apprenticeship was considered completed at the date of his enlistment in 1940 having worked for over four years in engineering.

Jim enlisted in January 1940. He joined the 4th/5th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers (Infantry Regiment) and saw action in France. He attained the rank of Sergeant. His Battalion, a Territorial Army unit, was part of the 156th Infantry Brigade sent to France in mid-June 1940 following the Dunkirk Evacuation, in an unsuccessful attempt to form a second British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Later in June 1940, the Territorial 4th/5th Battalion was evacuated from France along with the 2nd and 6thth Battalions during 'Operation Aerial'.³



Portraits of Jim Symons during the Second World War.

The middle photo is when he was with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1940 and the other two – later in the 1940s – were when he served with the Royal Engineers.

The Allied forces of the First BEF had been overwhelmed by three well-armed and highly-trained German Panzer Corps which broke through the Allied lines at the Ardennes and surrounded and pushed the British, French and Belgian armies back to the coast. The BEF lost 68,000 soldiers during the French campaign and had to abandon nearly all of its tanks, vehicles, and equipment. The evacuation from Dunkirk (under Operation Dynamo) by the Royal Navy, the French Navy, the Canadian Navy and hundreds of yachts, fishing boats, lifeboats and pleasure craft sent over from England, is a famous chapter in British military history. Nearly 340,000 men were rescued from Dunkirk.

The Second BEF was a disaster from the start. It was hoped that these forces might be sufficient to help stabilise the French defence and, if all else failed, there was talk of creating a "redoubt" or

³ This operation is sometimes spelt 'Ariel'.

fortified foothold in the Brittany peninsula. General Alan Brooke – a competent and distinguished general - was appointed Commander. He arrived in France on 13 June and quickly realised that there was little hope of success for the rest of his command, which included more than 100,000 logistic troops who had not been trained for combat. On 14 June, Brooke persuaded Churchill that all British troops should be evacuated from France without delay. 192,000 Allied troops and a large amount of their equipment were rescued from eight major sea ports on the south west coast of France in Operation Aerial. The only serious setback was the bombing of the troopship *Lancastria* off St Nazaire, resulting in the deaths of about 4,000 of those on board.

The War Diary of the 4th/5th Battalion (in which Jim was serving) documents that it arrived in Brest, France, on 12 June 1940. The Battalion participated in limited enemy engagement and on 17 June it was evacuated from Cherbourg, France, to Southampton and Poole, England. So, Jim Symons' service in France had lasted only five days.

The evacuation ports for Operation Aerial are shown on the map below. The combined number of men rescued under Operation Dynamo at Dunkirk and Operation Aerial was over half a million. Some authorities put the figure as high as 560,000 men.



Ports used in the evacuation of Allied forces during Operation Aerial.

Jim's Division (the 52nd) was evacuated from Cherbourg, which can be seen on the map as the most northerly of the evacuation sites. The evacuation was under the command of Admiral William Milbourne James, Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth. He directed the larger troop and cargo ships to operate from Southampton and the smaller coastal ships to use Poole. The rear-guard battalion was evacuated in the afternoon of 18 June; the first German troops were entering the outskirts of the town as the last ship sailed at 4 pm. In all, 30,360 men had been evacuated and taken to Portsmouth.

A Symons' family anecdote relates an incident that occurred during the withdrawal of Jim's unit to Cherbourg for evacuation. A suspected provocateur attempted to direct them towards the German offensive line instead of Cherbourg. Jim's knowledge of French and his ability to read the French road signs and maps enabled him to lead his unit successfully to Cherbourg where they abandoned their vehicles in the harbour and were able to return to Britain. The suspected provocateur was arrested as a suspected spy. The War Diary contains an entry that, during the course of moving personnel towards Cherbourg for evacuation, "*a man wearing the uniform of a French Officer was arrested on suspicion of being an enemy agent*" and was later "*banded to French Authorities*".



British troops being evacuated from Brest during Operation Aerial, 16–17 June 1940.

Back in England, like most of the British Army after Dunkirk, the Fusiliers began training to repel an expected German invasion, which never occurred.



The Royal Scots Fusiliers, Sergeant's Group Photo, 1941/42 – James is in the 3rd row from the front, 2nd from the right.

In June 1942, Jim was posted to the Corps of Royal Engineers and immediately joined 142 Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) at Newark in Nottingham. In January 1943, he was discharged under King's Regulation 390, and immediately commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with a new service number - 258840. He was posted to the 618th Field Company, Royal Engineers where he was occupied in a wide range of military engineering works in the UK including the construction of camps, water supply, and bridges. In September 1944 he joined Task Force 135 which was the name given to the Channel Islands Relief Force.



39/2 Class R.E. (Field) OCTU. No. 2 Coy. Senior Class. Dec 1942. Jim is in the second last row, third from the left.

The German occupation of the Channel Islands lasted for most of the Second World War, from 30 June 1940 until liberation on 9 May 1945. The Bailiwick of Jersey and Bailiwick of Guernsey are two British Crown dependencies in the English Channel, near the coast of Normandy. The Channel Islands were the only part of the *de jure* British Empire to be occupied by Nazi Germany during the war.

On 15 June 1940, after the Allied defeat in the Battle of France, the British government decided that the Channel Islands were of no strategic importance and would not be defended. The British government gave up the oldest possession of the Crown without firing a single shot. The last British troops left the islands on 20 June 1940, departing so quickly that bedding and half-consumed meals were left in Castle Cornet. The Islands were subsequently invaded and occupied by German military forces for the duration of the war.

On 8 May 1945 at 10:00 am the islanders were informed by the German authorities that the war was over. Winston Churchill announced that hostilities with Germany would end officially at one minute past midnight on the 9 May 1945. Jim was with the British forces that arrived on 9 May for the reoccupation of the Channel Islands after German forces on the islands accepted the terms of unconditional surrender.

German garrisons on the Islands comprised a total of 26,909 personnel who became Prisoners of War. German soldiers and engineers were used to assist in various civilian and engineering tasks required for the reoccupation as noted in James' personal records.

Jim was on the island of Guernsey and one day, while riding a motorcycle, was driven off the road into a ditch by a German truck and he suffered life threatening injuries. He was taken to hospital where a British Army doctor considered that amputation of his badly damaged leg would be necessary to save his life. However, a German Army doctor insisted that amputation was not necessary and his view prevailed. Jim's life and leg were saved and, although he was badly damaged and scarred, he was able to walk again. His disability caused by this incident was the reason that his commission – with the rank of Lieutenant - was relinquished on 26 January 1946 due to him being wounded in war service.

A week before his discharge, on 19 January 1946, James Symons married Agnes (Nance) Ross Wilson. Nance had enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1942 when she was 21 years old. She was a Leading Aircraft Woman (Service No. 2074988) and served in administration of equipment stores in England managing clothing and various other items. They had met earlier on the Isle of Bute and Jim and Nance were able to obtain leave for a few days for their marriage in Kings Park Parish Church in Glasgow. James was married in his Royal Engineer's Officer's Uniform. Nance wore civilian clothes for the marriage but had to change back into her WAAF uniform and return to her base a few days later.



Jim and Nance Symons on their wedding day – January 1946.

Back in civilian life, in 1946, Jim commenced work with the Royal Burgh of Dunbarton (Argyll and Bute) as an Assistant Engineer. In 1947, he joined the Port of Glasgow as the Surveyor and later the Assistant Engineer. During all this time, Jim continued his engineering study through the Civil Engineering Correspondence College, Acocks Green, Birmingham. He passed the Associate Membership Examinations for the Institution of Civil Engineers (UK) in 1949 and was elected an Associate Member on 18 Dec 1951.

In November 1949, Jim and Nance left the UK so that Jim could take up a position with the Colonial Engineering Service as an Executive Engineer in the Public Works Department of the Gold Coast, West Africa. His salary was £650 per annum, with expatriate pay of an additional £200, but £90 was deducted for accommodation costs. For the first two years he served in the northern districts of Salaga and Tamale, followed by a year at Kumasi District, Ashanti. This was followed by stints in the Districts of Tarkwa, Dunkwa, Trans-Volta and Accra - the capital city. Later he became Assistant Director of Public Works in Togoland and the Trans-Volta Region.

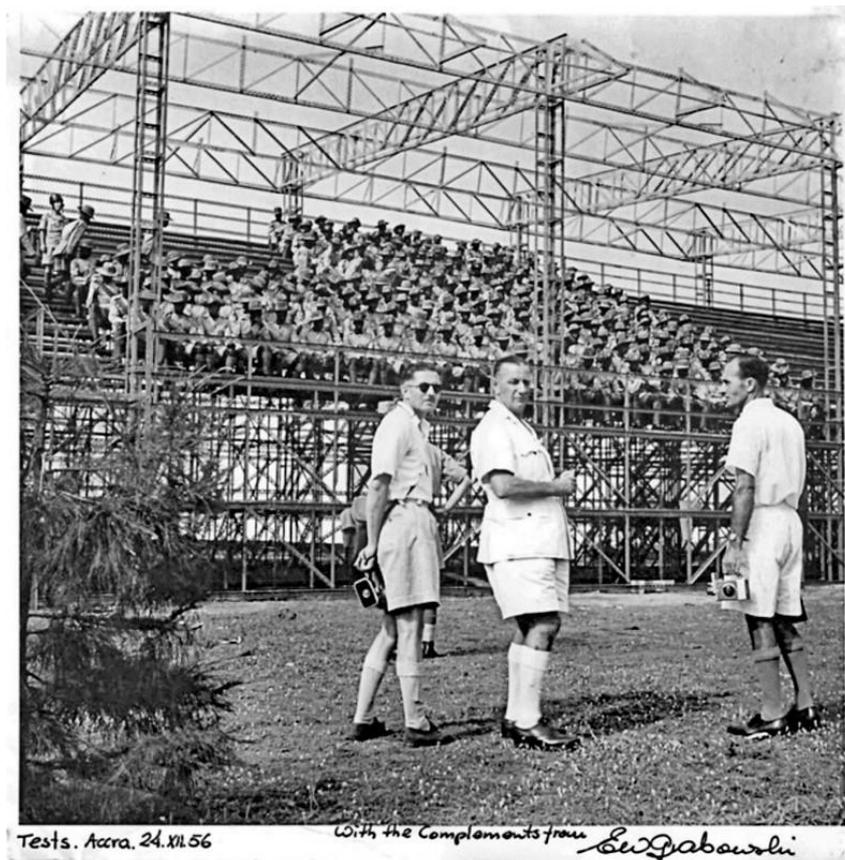
The British Crown Colony of the Gold Coast was located on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. At that time, nationalists shared power with the British and, in 1957, it achieved independence under the name of Ghana. Their two children were born there; Philip in 1951 and Brenda in 1954.



Jim Symons seated on the left of the front row with staff of PWD – Gold Coast.



Jim and Nance – 6th and 7th from the left – seated at the front – Gold Coast, 1956.



Jim Symons (left) during testing of Accra grandstands constructed by the Public Woks Dept. for Ghana Independence Celebrations in 1957. Testing involved Ghanaian soldiers marching 'in-step' repeatedly across the grandstand to proof test the stability and strength of the structure. Date of photo: 24 Dec 1956.

After the declaration of independence of Ghana, Jim and family returned to Scotland. They arrived back in Liverpool in June 1958 and stayed in Scotland for about six months before leaving for Australia. As part of Australia's 'Assisted Passage Migration Scheme', they departed Southampton on the SS *Fairsea* on 22 January 1959 bound for Melbourne. They arrived on 24 February 1959.

The family lived a short while in the Broadmeadows Migrant Camp before taking up residence at a Housing Commission home at 40 Ophir St, Broadmeadows for four years. The family moved to their new house that they had built at 1 Cole Court, Box Hill North in January 1963.

Jim joined the Country Roads Board in March 1959. He worked as an Assistant Engineer on road construction and maintenance and was later promoted to the position of Assistant Asphalt Engineer in the CRB's Asphalt Division. But there is a last, tragic twist to Jim's story. He died on 23 February 1968 at Wodonga District Hospital, Victoria, along with CRB engineers Colin Glare and Ronald Watt, as a result of injuries sustained when their vehicle was struck from behind by a speeding and unroadworthy truck at about the 180-mile post on the Hume Highway north of Barnawartha. They had been inspecting asphalt sealing works. Seven of his eight pall bearers were CRB colleagues – Ed King, Bill Brake, Don Houston, Frank Hopwood, Jack Parkinson, Peter Ager and Jack Ross.

In March 2022, I had the honour to meet Nance not long before her 101st birthday. While she was physically frail, her memory was still pretty sharp and she recalled going to the dances during the war. She loved ballroom dancing. Jim was not her only suitor apparently. She also recalled the kindness and support she received after Jim's death, from his friends and colleagues at the CRB.



Nance Symons flanked by her daughter, Brenda, and her son, Philip – 8 March 2022.

Nance died in August 2023 aged 102 years.

Jim's son, Philip (Phil), joined the CRB in 1974. He followed in his father's footsteps as an engineer and spent 38 years working for the CRB and its successors – the RCA and VicRoads. In addition to his initial engineering duties of road management and construction, road safety and traffic engineering, Phil also served in other corporate positions including corporate policy and planning, road information services, road network policy and planning, international projects, motor registration and driver licensing, internal audit, corporate insurance and risk management. He retired in 2012 as the Director of Risk Management.

Augustus (Gus) Veismanis

Gus was born in Latvia in 1913. As a young man he lived with his mother while he attended university studying mathematics. To support himself he worked part-time in the laboratory of a brandy factory.

Gus was still studying when Latvia was occupied by Russia in June 1940. One day, Gus was with a group of young men near a national monument when they were arrested by Russian soldiers and they were marched off to a nearby police station. As they were being taken down a corridor, Gus noticed an open door, and quickly stepped through it. He was not noticed and, after hiding for a short time, he made his way out of the police station without being challenged. Nothing was ever heard of the other young men who accompanied him.

Later in 1940, the Russians were driven out of Latvia by the Germans. By this time, Gus had completed his studies except for the submission of a thesis. Latvian men were being conscripted by the Germans for military service, but students were exempted. Gus continued to work on his thesis, but he made sure that there was still some work to be done to complete it and, in this way, he was able to stave off conscription. However, in 1944, the Germans were becoming desperate and the exemption was scrapped. Gus was conscripted into a labour battalion which was engaged in digging trenches behind the German lines. These were to be used as part of the strategy for the retreat of the Germans from the advancing Russian army.

As the end of the war approached, Gus decided he would rather be captured by the Americans than the Russians, so he set out alone towards the Western front. He did not know what had happened to his mother and it was many years later that he learnt that she was still alive. He wrote to her regularly but they were never to meet again.

After spending time in a refugee camp in Germany, Gus came to Melbourne in 1947 aboard the SS *General Stuart Heinzelman* which embarked from Bremerhaven in Germany. He spoke good English and, after spending a few months in Bonegilla, he got a job as a labourer at the Northcote brickworks. It was hard work. He had to stack freshly moulded bricks in the kilns before firing. Gus said it was the best job he ever had.

Gus wanted to obtain a university degree. Because of Cold War restrictions on contact with countries in the Soviet Union, he was unable to provide evidence of the studies he had completed in Latvia. He studied Science at the University of Melbourne by working night shifts at the brickworks. He completed his degree majoring in physics and mathematics.

He started work at the CRB as a Scientific Officer and pioneered work in triaxial shear testing relating to the stability of bridge embankments and foundations. He also introduced new methods for consolidation testing of soils. He continued to study all his life and sent many of Austroads and VicRoads technical publications which he bought from the bookshop, and mailed them to authorities in Latvia.

Gus died in 2003.

George Clarence Whyley

George was on the staff of the Board's Secretariat and the Correspondence Section at Head Office in Kew. George was born in London in 1920 and served in the British Army. He married Kathleen McDonald in Camberwell, London in 1941.



George Whyley – date unknown.

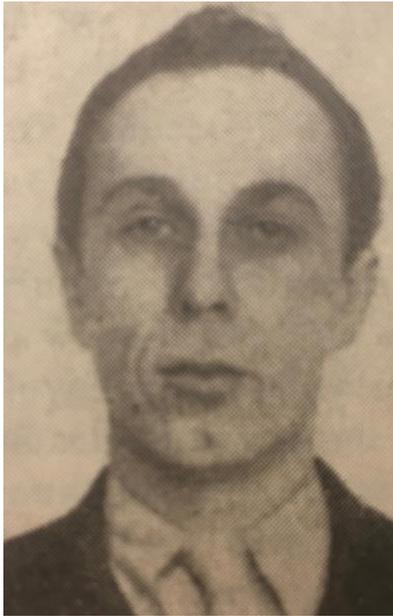
He and Kathleen, and their two daughters (Sylvia and Pauline), departed from Southampton and arrived in Melbourne in November 1955. So far, I have no other information although there was an unsubstantiated report that he was on the personal staff of Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery. Sounds a bit suspect to me.

He died in Airey's Inlet in 2005 and is buried in Lilydale.

S. Zadra

Mr Zadra was born and educated in Warsaw in Poland where he worked in Government Departments dealing with roads and water supply. During the war, he fought with the Underground and, in 1944, he was captured and transferred to a camp in Germany. He remained in the camp for 12 months before liberation. He came to Australia in 1949.

This is all the information I have been able to find – from a CRB *Roadlines* magazine in 1950.



S. Zadra – 1950.