

*Not for  
ourselves,  
but for others*



John Christie



John Gray



Charles Twedde



Gregory Hunkin

# *Not for ourselves, but for others*

*The Story of the young men after whom  
the Houses of  
Numurkah Secondary College  
are named:*

*John Scott Christie  
John Adam Gray  
Gregory Herbert Hunkin  
Charles Joseph Tweddle*

*dedicated to the students of  
Numurkah*



*Lindsay B. Opie  
History Teacher, N.S.C.*

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*Non nobis, sed omnibus*  
*Not for one, but for all. ...*

*Unity is our key to win,*  
*Our dreams we can achieve,*  
*In sports, the arts and technology*  
*We excel because we believe.*

*For many years our school has fulfilled*  
*Its hopes and all of its aims.*  
*A philosophy that relies on*  
*Unity all the same.*

*Non nobis, sed omnibus*  
*Not for one, but for all.*  
*For together we can reach our goals.*  
*Non nobis, sed omnibus*  
*Not for one, but for all.*  
*Side by side together, we stand tall.*

Dean Bryant and Alison Coonan, 1992

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# Foreword

My aim is to tell a little of the childhood and adolescence of the young men after whom the Houses of the Numurkah Secondary College are named as well as recount their involvement in the Second World War, 1939 - 1945. This has only been made possible through the loving memories and recollections of remaining family members and close friends. Their time, patience and assistance has been invaluable.

My only regret is that this project was not undertaken sooner while there were more family and friends around to provide more information to flesh out the details. However those who have assisted should be proud of their long memories and their ability to recall things which happened over fifty years ago as if it were yesterday. I was most delighted to find that Arch Rogers, founding Headmaster of Numurkah High School, had the foresight to obtain information from each of the families in 1951 while it was still fresh in their memories. This has been invaluable.

I am most grateful to all who have contributed and each one is acknowledged hereafter, however a special thanks must go to the Reverend Edward Hunkin who first suggested that this project be undertaken.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Liz Dell, Karen Fletcher and Wendy Van Kalken who have carefully proof-read the manuscript, and also Cliff Moss and Jack Thornton for their invaluable personal knowledge of each of these fine young men. Thanks must also go to family members who provided the photographs: Keith Christie, Cliff Moss, Betty Briggs, Joan Yates, Maurine Wearne and Beryl Wilkinson.

If there should be any discrepancies between your recollections or stories of these fine young men and what is presented here, I apologize. Time, in all its forms, has been a problem. I only hope that this booklet serves to give some insight into the lives of young men who have been greatly honoured by their peers and their descendants.

It has been my pleasure to have had the opportunity of collecting and collating the information supplied. It has been a wonderful opportunity to learn more of each of these young men and a great opportunity to also learn more about the community which they represented during the dark days of war.

Lindsay B. Opie  
December 1995

# Introduction

When the Numurkah Higher Elementary School graduated to become the Numurkah High School in 1951, a number of changes took place. One of those changes was to increase the number of School Houses from two to four. A second, more significant change, was to give each House a name. Geoffrey Scott included the following in his report on "How The Houses Were Named" in the first Edition of the *Bangerang*:

' It was decided to give to the Houses the names of men who gave their lives on active service during the World War and whose families have had a long association with the school. The names chosen were Christie, Gray, Tweddle and Hunkin.' (*Bangerang* Volume 1, Number 1, 1951, p.2)

The mists of time have obscured the exact reasons as to why Arch Rogers, the founding Principal of Numurkah High School, chose or allowed the choice of the names of local 'heroes' rather than Prime Ministers, famous Australians or native flora and fauna, but the following seem logical and acceptable explanations:

- # All of the young men, with the exception of John Christie, had attended the Higher Elementary School.
- # All of the young men were known to the inaugural students of the High School - either by personal association or the association of family and friends.
- # The families of all of the young men were somehow involved in the life of the School - both the Higher Elementary School and the High School. Each family was also well-known throughout the District.
- # All had made the supreme sacrifice in wartime and displayed courage, loyalty, persistence, ingenuity, service, comradeship and other attributes which Arch Rogers presumably felt were an important part in the lives of all of his students and those of future generations - these were the qualities which would make them worthwhile citizens and responsible, successful parents.

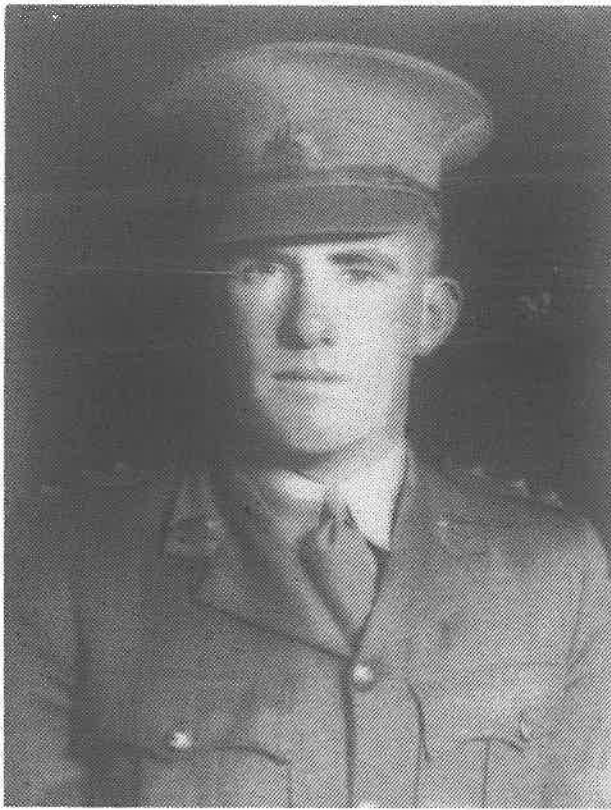
When this last assumption is viewed in the light of the School Motto '*Non nobis, sed omnibus.*' ('Not for ourselves, but for others.'), which was used by the Higher Elementary School and adopted by the High School, it appears that Arch Rogers deliberately welded the two together, to place them firmly in the minds of his students. We must therefore assume that, for whatever reason, these young men were chosen from among a number to stand for specific ideals and values, becoming role models to the rising generation.

Each of us needs role models and heroes in our lives - people who have displayed worthwhile values and traits of character. In their own right Jack, Johnny, Greg and Charlie exhibited personal values and characteristics which are well worth following whatever generation we belong to.

For that reason this booklet is dedicated to their memory and to all students of Numurkah High School/Secondary College.

# JOHN SCOTT CHRISTIE 1913 - 1942

Jack Christie was energetic and enthusiastic. He was a respecter of people and for this was greatly respected in return. He often put others ahead of himself, taking time to listen and to help, even though it might have been inconvenient.



John Scott Christie, known as 'Jack' among his friends and called 'Paddy' by his family, was born at Numurkah on the 23rd February, 1913. He was the eldest son of John Scott Christie Jnr. and Margaret Janet Christie (nee Thornton). The Christie family comprised ten children - John, Jim, Frank, Lennie, Margaret, Joan, Gordon, Bruce, Keith and Francis.



James Thornton Christie, 16 months (seated)  
and John Scott Christie, 2.5 years

His grandfather, John Scott Christie Snr., selected a property 'Fawcett' at Ulupna in 1880. His descendants have continued to farm in the area ever since .

Jack was a handsome young man. He was slim and five foot eleven inches tall. His eyes were brown as was his hair.

He was educated at the Strathmerton West Primary School and received his 'Merit' certificate (Year 8) in November, 1926. This year proved to be a turning point in the life of young Jack and the whole Christie family. On the 26th October John Scott Christie Jnr. died, leaving his wife Margaret to cope with a large, young family. Margaret's brother, Jim Thornton, virtually took the boys under his wing. Both Margaret and Jim determined that a male influence was important in the lives of growing boys



so the two eldest sons, Jack and Jim, were sent as boarders to Wesley College, Melbourne. Each of the other members of this large family attended the Numurkah Higher Elementary School, completing Form IV and thus receiving their Intermediate Certificate.

Jack spent two years at Wesley as a boarder, then returned to Katunga to work on 'Eastwood' and other family properties. There he worked hard with his brothers - except for a year spent in Western Australia (1934) - until he enlisted in the 2nd A.I.F. in 1940.

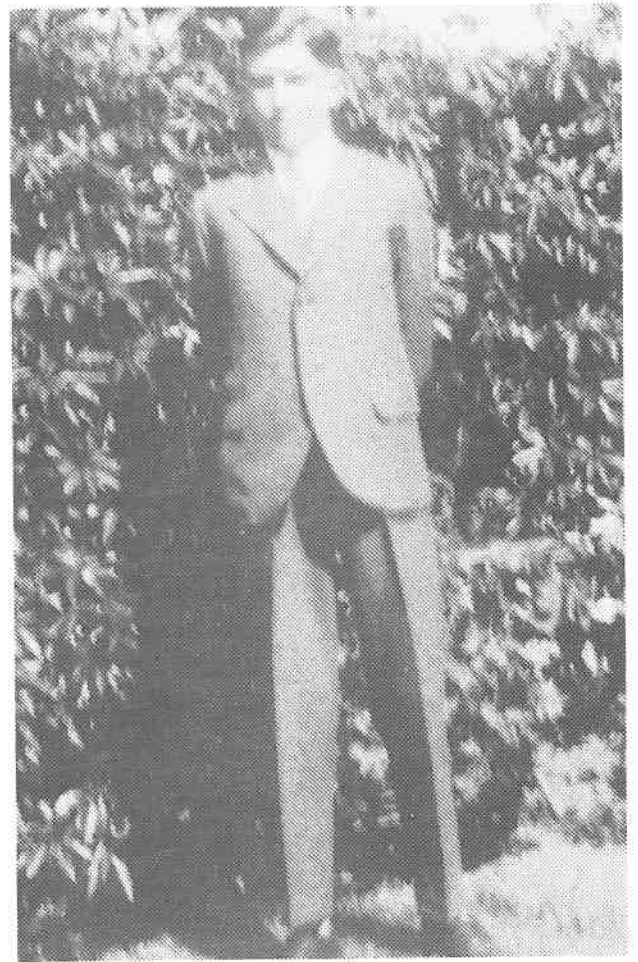
Although Jack was only 13 when his father died, John Scott Jnr. left a legacy of community service and involvement for all of his children to follow. He was devoted to his family, his friends and family. He and his family attended the Yalca South Methodist Church and were involved in its activities.

His wife Margaret said that: '[John] took a keen interest in educational matters, and was a member of the Strathmerton West school committee. When the movement for the establishment of a Higher Elementary School in Numurkah was started, he was one of the first to volunteer assistance, and so esteemed was the work he performed in that connection that he was elected a member of the first school council. He had been chosen to speak at the [official] opening of the school [following the additions to the Primary School] but unfortunately Providence had ruled to the contrary.' (It is therefore assumed that although Jack was never a student at the Higher Elementary School, his father's influence in the early years and the fact that eight of his siblings did attend the School, made him eligible to give his name to one of the Houses on the establishment of the High School.)

As a student and even afterwards Jack read everything. His youngest brother

Keith recalled: '[Paddy was] an avid reader. I remember him reading all types of books including encyclopaedia, history books, particularly military history'. He was also into politics. His sister Margaret (Mrs. Cliff Moss, deceased) once confided to her husband Cliff that following his return from Wesley 'Paddy was like a father to his younger brothers and sisters. Every night he read them stories or simply made them up on the spot'.

Jack was also a good student but he was prone to daydreaming, which often landed him into trouble because his



Jack in his Wesley uniform

mind was elsewhere and not where his teachers and others wanted it to be. Apart from this he was well mannered and well disciplined.

Although he played tennis at school, ('only because he had to' someone reported), Jack was not keen on sport, in

fact he wasn't particularly good at it, unlike the rest of the Christie clan who were sports mad. However he was fond of Ballroom Dancing and attended many balls in the District. Yet one of the young ladies who often partnered him recalled that 'he had no sense of rhythm, often treading on my toes'.

In October, 1936, encouraged by members of the Numurkah branch of the R.S.L., Jack formed a troop of the 20th

were [now] rich and famous. ... With their Light Horse rig, their slouch hats and puggarees, and their plumes of emu feathers, they provided the town with a rare touch of glamour. ... The townsfolk, especially the kids, revelled in the excitement of it all and lined the main street to cheer them on. They were the towns pride and joy and they loved every minute of it.' (Gunner Finkmeyer *It Happened To Us*, p. 118)



Members of the Numurkah Troop of the 20th Light Horse Regiment, C.M.F., formed by Jack Unfortunately he is not in this photo but Johnny Gray is 2nd from left, top row

Light Horse Regiment, C.M.F.. In 1937 he was appointed Lieutenant and was in charge of the parades held monthly in Numurkah. Each year the troop joined with other members of the regiment at special training camps. Members of the troop included Frank Christie, Jack Thornton, Johnny Gray, Cliff Moss, Reg Cowan and other members of the now famous 'Numurkah Mob'.

All members of the troop saw it as 'a diversion, ... a great escape from the normal hum drum life on the farm and gave them all a great uplift. ... [They]

After the outbreak of the war the members of the troop wanted to join as a unit, however when Jack, who was their lieutenant, was given a commission in Dandenong, the men decided to enlist in the artillery. (The story of some of these men, the 'Numurkah Mob', is contained in the story of Johnny Gray.)

His friend and future brother-in-law, Cliff Moss said of him that 'Paddy had a military brain. He did everything right. He knew instinctively what to do and how to do it. He was a natural born soldier'.



Jack enlisted in the 2nd A.I.F. on the 29th July 1940 and was selected by its Commanding Officer, Colonel Alan Spowers, to serve as a Lieutenant in the newly formed 2/24th Infantry Battalion, 26th Brigade, 9th Australian Division on the 18th August



Jack Christie and Florence Green on their wedding day, 26th October 1940

Unit training took place at Wangaratta and Bonegilla. 'Everything in its [entire] training program was evaluated in the light of the maxim - "As ye shall train so shall ye fight".' (R.P. Serle, *The 2/24*, p. 2)

On the 26th October, whilst on final leave, Jack married Florence Isobel Green of 'Glenbrook', Baynton (near Kyneton) at Scots Church Melbourne. Although they already knew each other as Florence was first cousin to Cliff Moss and had attended many Moss-Christie-Thornton get-togethers at Numurkah, it was not until Jack was posted to Dandenong where they again met that they really took an interest in each other. Following Jack's death Florence joined the W.A.A.F.S. in 1943

and, at the end of the war, returned home to care for one of her brothers. She died at Kyneton on 3rd March 1991.

The 2/24th embarked on the 'Strathmore' on the 15th November, 1940, arriving in the Middle East on the 17th December. Here they disembarked at the canal port of Kantara. From here they made their way to their training camp at Dimra in Palestine.

From here on the 9th Division was involved in all of the major Middle East campaigns. After retreating from Benghazi they took up defensive positions in the fortress of Tobruk. Keith Christie, who has taken a keen interest in the events which involved his eldest brother Paddy said: 'The Germans attacked Tobruk on the 30th April, 1941 and [Paddy's] platoon occupied and held posts S8 and S9 and stopped the advance on their portion of the line.'

Chester Wilmott stated the following in his book *Tobruk*: 'During the afternoon [of May 1st] Italian infantry, without [German] tank support, could make little impression on the next three posts - S8, S9, S10, held by part of the 2/24th's right company. ... [Due to a communications breakdown the 2/23rd was ordered] to re-establish contact with, or, if necessary control of, these three positions. Captain Malloch's company went out at dusk. Their advance was greeted by mortars and artillery. Bren carriers protecting their flank drew shells from Axis anti-tank guns. ... When Lieutenant Bowden's platoon got near S9 they found the enemy had surrounded it, but after a short hand-to-hand struggle with Italians in the anti-tank ditch around the post they captured thirty-three of them and fought their way through to the relief of Lieutenant [Jack] Christie and five men. Christie told them that at dusk, under cover of heavy machine-gun fire from the escarpment near S7, Italian infantry had succeeded in getting up to the

anti-tank ditch around S9, but had been pinned down by small arms fire and grenades. Soon after dark, the position in this area was fully restored and the enemy attempt to widen the bridgehead on the northern flank had been stopped.' (Chester Wilmott *Tobruk*: pp. 140 - 141)

Although wounded in action Jack remained with his company until the 9th Division was relieved in September 1941, having been the very first Allied Division to repel German attacks in World War II.

On the 2nd September 1941 Jack was promoted to the rank of Captain.

In April 1942 it was revealed that, during the period February 1941 to July 1941, Jack was mentioned in dispatches. The following letter, dated 9th June, 1942, was sent to Jack's wife Florence.

Dear Madam,

It is with much pleasure that the following extract from the Second Supplement of the London gazette, No. 35396, dated 26/12/1941, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the undermentioned member of the Australian Military Forces, is forwarded:-

"His majesty the King {George VI} has been graciously pleased to approve that the following be mentioned in recognition of distinguished services in the Middle East, (including Egypt, East Africa, The Western Desert, The Sudan, Greece, Crete, Syria and Tobruk) during the period February, 1941 to July, 1941."

(VX48605) Captain CHRISTIE,  
John Scott, 2/24 Bn.

Yours faithfully ...

(Letter from the Australian Military Forces - Southern Command)

At the conclusion of their involvement at Tobruk the 2/24th returned to Syria and The Lebanon to be re-equipped and re-inforced.

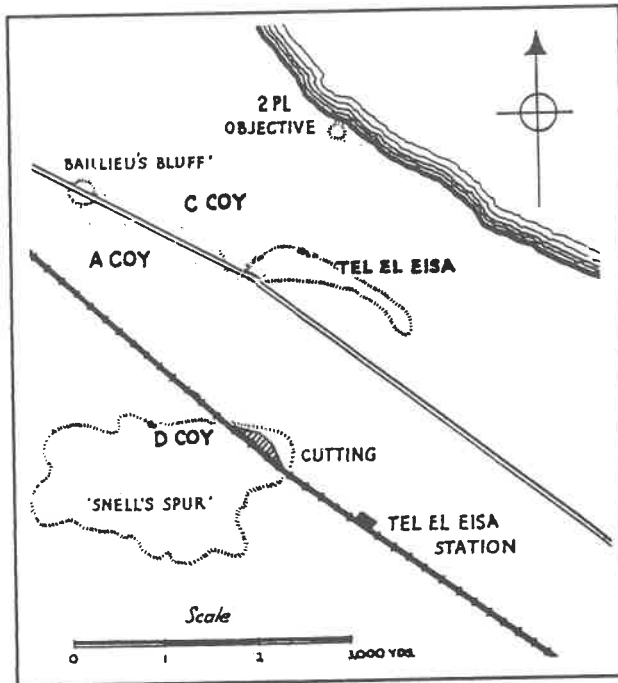
While on a route march with his battalion Jack found that amongst those in another group were men that he knew from Numurkah - the Tuttle brothers, Bill and Jim. He therefore ordered his men to stop so that he could stop and chat, catching up on news from the men and from home.

His affection for those who served under him is shown in a letter sent to the Christie family by Charles Scales who returned to the family a pipe belonging to Jack. Charles says: 'I have had this cherrywood pipe ever since it was given to me by Lt. John Christie in Tobruk when I was his Platoon runner. He was a good bloke and often passed the pipe



Jack in Tel Aviv,  
smoking his cherrywood pipe

around to be shared, as tobacco and cigarettes were scarce. When his whisky ration came around (very rarely) he shared that also with his men. I had a lot to do with him and respected him



Location of Tel El Eisa  
based on R.P. Serle, *The 2/24*

immensely. He was very game and always cheerful and we would do anything he wanted. He lacked [a] sense of direction and I used to fire a tracer bullet in the air to direct him back to Platoon H.Q., at an appointed time, when he had to attend conferences at Company or Battalion H.Q. at night time. He was seldom without his pipe and it has been valued by me but I think it is time that his family had it.' (Letter from C. Scales to the Christie family, 18th May, 1979)

In support of what Charles Scales said of Jack's ability to get from point 'A' to point 'B' Cliff Moss recalls that Jack did have a poor sense of direction. He remembered that, during their Light Horse days, 'Paddy would often say "left turn" and immediately go to the right - which is what he wanted his men to do!'

In July, 1942, the 9th Division was sent to El Alamein to assist in stopping the advance of the German North Afrika Corps commanded by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to take the Suez Canal.

The Division stopped the German advance at Tel El Eisa and at El

Alamein. As part of this operation the 2/24th captured Field Marshal Rommel's Signals Interception Unit which decoded British signals to the British Army. Documents thus captured also contained Rommel's codes. British Intelligence then used these codes to crack Afrika Corps messages to its armies, thereby being able to defeat Rommel and his troops at El Alamein. The men of the 2/24th were not aware of the priceless nature of their capture for many years, that is why Serle did not mention it in his history.

After two days of heavy fighting with his battalion at Tel El Eisa, Jack was fatally wounded on the 13th July, 1942 at age 29 years.

The events surrounding his death are recorded by Serle and read as follows: 'The second-in-command of "A" Company, Captain Jack Christie, was a very popular bushman from Numurkah in Victoria. Late on 11 July he had been hit on the leg by a red-hot bomb splinter from a Stuka attack and "Doc" Robertson was giving him treatment at battalion headquarters. As soon as the shelling intensified to such a level that a counter-attack was obvious, Captain Christie decided to return to his company. When the attack was at its height a runner came over the crest from the 2/23rd Battalion and reported the company short of ammunition and the enemy very close and within range of small-arms fire. "A" Company dispatched a Bren gunner from each platoon and sent them to assist on the ridge, and John Christie volunteered to take a party forward with ammunition. He had just delivered it and was turning to come back when he was hit in the back by a machine-gun burst. He died of wounds next day, to the great sorrow of the whole unit.' (R.P. Serle, *The 2/24*, pp. 172 - 173)

Jack Christie lies buried in the El Alamein War Cemetery.

# John Adam Gray

1917 - 1944

Johnny Gray was a great sportsman, excelling in all major sports. His mates were an important part of his life and he believed in being loyal to them at all times. An optimist with a tremendous sense of humour, he had a great outlook on life. Although tough at times, life was to be lived and enjoyed.



John 'Jack' 'Johnny' Gray was born at Numurkah on the 4th of October, 1917. He was the second child and eldest son of Adam and Amy Gray who farmed 622 acres at Drumanure which the Gray family had originally selected in about 1887. The other members of the family were Joyce, George, Betty and Joan.

The Grays were well known, respected, members of the Drumanure community. They played an active role in the affairs of the Drumanure Presbyterian Church, with Mrs. Gray, Joyce and Joan holding the position of Church organist.

Johnny was of average height. He had grey eyes and a shock of gingery-brown hair. He was thin and had a pale complexion which belied his tough, wiry strength. He was blessed with very long arms and big hands which he used to advantage in football and when boxing. One of his mates, Cliff Moss, remembered that he was a terror to box against 'because, just when you thought you were out of reach, this huge fist attached to an orangutan-like arm would stretch out and hit you on the jaw or chest, etc.'

Johnny attended Drumanure Primary School, then travelled 7 miles each way every day driving horse in sulky to go to the Numurkah Higher Elementary School. The horses were stabled at either Venables' or Brown & Corke's stores or McKay's blacksmith shop. Although Johnny did fairly well at school, it wasn't his favourite thing in life. His brother George recalls the incident which led to his leaving school. He said: 'We (four of us) were about one mile from Numurkah one frosty morning when the old horse [called Waterline] crashed in the sulky, right outside the cemetery. What with broken shafts, harness, etc., Johnny promptly walks six miles home and announces "No more school!"'

It was 1933, and now Johnny commenced work, helping Dad on the family farm.

His greatest interest in life while at school was sport, at which he excelled.

He was a good cricketer, a great footballer and a keen swimmer, representing Numurkah Higher Elementary School in all three sports. After leaving school Johnny played sport at weekends, to relieve the tedium of farm work. He played cricket for both Drumanure and Wunghnu, and footy for Numurkah. As already noted he was a good boxer and he was also a good billiards player.

Like most kids Johnny had pets - two sheep dogs and several horses. His favourite horse was called Dolly whom he often took with him in field exercises with the 20th Light Horse. In 1939, whilst on a three month training camp near Torquay, he proudly rode her in the funeral procession for an English Brigadier.

His sister Betty remembers Jack, as she always calls him, as 'a quiet sort of fellow who paid attention and usually weighed the situation up and could deal with it if necessary - or, if not too urgent, could, at the drop of a hat come up with a joke, or tell a yarn, that left us usually with sides aching, laughing our heads off. He was a great story teller and, I think, he enjoyed the lighter side of life'. Everyone who knew Johnny remembers his tremendous sense of humour and his great yarns.

Johnny was a good mixer. His love of sport and his loyalty to his mates made him popular among the boys. One of his sisters said: 'He would stick to his mates through thick and thin if the chips were down'. Also his dry wit plus the fact that he was easy going made him popular with the girls too. Isabel Green recalls the dances which they all attended as 'fun times'. She always enjoyed dancing with Johnny: 'He was a good dancer and had a good sense of humour'.

In 1936 he joined the 20th Light Horse Regiment C.M.F. under the leadership of Lieutenant John Christie and had three years of valuable part-time training. Apparently the powers that be decided to strengthen the armed forces and expand the militia in view of the trouble that was looming in Europe and Asia.



Joyce and Johnny all set to leave for the Higher Elementary School, seven miles away in Numurkah

Speaking of this experience Reg Cowan said: 'To add variety and glamour to our lives the sons of farmers within a radius of 10 or 12 miles joined the Numurkah troop of the 20th Light Horse Field Regiment, which consisted of troops from every town from Seymour to Jerilderie. To belong to a Regiment with such a renowned history was a great thrill. We looked very smart in our bright distinctive uniforms with the plumes of emu feathers in our slouch hats, especially when we were mounted on our horses, and there were some mighty fine horses. ... We were paid five "bob" for our horse - trained one day a month at Numurkah Showgrounds ... and went on a two week camp each February when the whole Regiment came together'. (Ivor Jones *The Numurkah Mob*, p.12.)

In 1939 war in Europe seemed inevitable





The Numurkah Mob with Lady Mayoress Cole and recruiting staff member,  
Melbourne Town Hall, 28th June 1940

Top: Dickie, Miller, Shannon, Laidlaw. Centre: Venables, Moss, Lady Mayoress, Gray, Cowan.  
Bottom: Gainey, Tyres, Thornton, Christie and Haynes. Standing: Recruiting officer

and the boys of the 20th Light Horse hoped that they would be called up as a group for overseas service. However this was not to be. In the ensuing discussions Sergeant Jack Thornton suggested that 'if war happened we should join the A.I.F. as a group'. This decision brought into existence the now famous 'Numurkah Mob', (although this title wasn't used until some time during training at Benalla in 1940) of which Johnny Gray was a proud member. The members of the Mob were: George Dickie, Alan Miller, Gerry Shannon, Jack Laidlaw, Les Venables, Cliff Moss, Jack Gray, Reg Cowan, Stan Gainey, Keith Tyres, Jack Thornton, Frank Christie, Ron Haynes and Jimmy Sharp.

Two of the original members, Jack Thornton and Jack Laidlaw were sent to

officer training schools and were then posted to other regiments. Jimmy Sharp was 'claimed out' by his father and was killed during a Japanese air raid in Singapore. Another young Numurkahite, Col McPherson, joined the group at Puckapunyal.

From this point on it is impossible to talk about Johnny without referring to the Mob, which was renowned for its togetherness - they did everything together. When it came time to enlist they did it together. For some reason now forgotten, Johnny Gray was the only one in civvies at the time of enlistment. That was on the 23rd May, 1940.

Jack Thornton recalls that 'after we had planted our [wheat] crops in 1940 we headed for Melbourne by train, dressed

in our Light Horse uniforms. We were a big attraction as we headed for the Town Hall. In fact the Press came and photographed us with the Lady Mayoress. It was good publicity for the Army too as articles appeared in *The Sun* and *The Herald*.

Immediately after having enlisted, stipulating the Artillery - 'no foot slogging for us' said Reg Cowan - the Mob had the audacity to individually ask for three weeks leave - to attend the wedding of Jack Thornton and Joyce Gray, Johnny's sister. Leave was granted. Who would dare risk the prospects of upsetting such a fine team of young men?

Once Jack and Joyce were married the Mob went into training - at Royal Park, Benalla, Wangaratta and Puckapunyal.

While at Pucka Johnny, along with the Mob, joined the 4th Anti-tank Regiment. Reg Cowan remembers 'the day after we arrived at Puckapunyal I went into hospital with the mumps. At this time the 8th Division was being formed and a new unit, the 4th Anti-tank Regiment had been formed. It was short of about 40 personnel so the C.O. Colonel McEachern arrived at our training battalion for recruits. [The men] were called on parade and the C.O. called for volunteers to join his regiment. Of course we all knew the golden rule - never volunteer for anything in the army. So the C.O. walked along the ranks picking at random. He stopped at Gerry Shannon. "Step out soldier", he said. Gerry did a couple of shuffles and nearly some handsprings and stuttered, "I've got about a dozen mates here sir". "Well get them too," responded the Colonel. Then Frank Christie looked up and said "One in - all in", so out stepped the rest of the Numurkah Mob. ... [On coming out of

hospital] I wasted no time in walking across to the 4th Anti-tank barracks, asked to see Major Owen and said I'd like to transfer to his 15th Battery. Col McPherson ... also transferred to the 4th Anti-tank Regiment [at this time, thus making him a member of the Mob].'  
(*The Numurkah Mob*, p.14)

On the 23rd July, 1941 Johnny, the Mob and the rest of the 4th Anti-tank Regiment sailed for Singapore on the Zealandia, escorted by the HMAS Sydney. Upon arrival this regiment fought with distinction in the defence of Malaya and Singapore against the invading Japanese forces. Writing of the Numurkah Mob Gunner Finkmeyer says: 'After fighting a hasty, action packed retreat down the mainland of Malaya and on Singapore Island, they were ordered to re-group with the Regiment at the botanical gardens. Here, to their great dismay, they were told that Singapore had capitulated and they were now prisoners of war.

'The one bright spot for them was that a quick tally of the boys showed that they all survived. ...

'Then on to Changi Prison where they gathered together for a short while and shared their arduous introduction to POW life.' (*It Happened To Us*, p. 124)

So, on the 15th February 1942 Johnny became a Prisoner of War. While in Changi the Mob was more or less able to stick together. But this did not last. The Japanese required men to work on the Burma Rail and, as ingenious as they were, the Mob could not organize to stay together. Gerry Shannon was sent off to work in camps near the Burma border, Keith Tyres went to Borneo, never to be heard of again, Stan Gainey and Ron Haynes stayed in Changi. The remainder 'were assigned to 'Don' Force and hustled into small steel rice trucks where they

spent the next five days in stifling heat and discomfort, until they reached Kamburi, in Thailand. They worked on the Wampo embankment, where they got their first taste of what it was like to be driven to [the] limits of their endurance, drilling rocks, dynamiting and clearing away the heavy rocks. They worked harder than they had ever worked in their lives until the embankment and the bridge across it had been completed.' (*It Happened To Us*, p. 125)



Members of the Mob at Mersing, Malaya  
 Standing: Moss, Cowan Haynes, Gainey  
 Sitting: McPherson, Gray, Dickie (obscured),  
 Shannon and Venables.

From here they were moved to a new camp at Kenyu, arriving on Anzac Day, 1943. Here they sweated and slaved on the 'Hellfire Pass' section of the Burma Railway. One assumes that despite all of the hardships and misery, Johnny's sense of humour was able to keep him and his mates in better condition than most.

Life as a P.O.W. was literally 'hell on earth'. The food was poor, the conditions were worse and the physical demands made by the enemy to complete work assignments were beyond belief. Cliff

Moss said that the worst part of being a P.O.W. was that there was no light at the end of the tunnel 'You didn't know how long it would last. Your main task was to survive - during the long work hours and even more so in the times alone.'

While working at 'Hellfire Pass' Johnny was struck down with malaria and beri beri. He fought valiantly for his life. 'Weak as he was, his eyes were bright with fire, and he would gasp, "There's no bloody way I'm going to die here. The bloody Japs are not going to get me. I'm going home to Numurkah to die of old age".' (*It Happened To Us*, p. 126)

Reg Cowan recalled: 'Beri beri is a strange illness, caused mainly through malnutrition and can be prevented by taking vitamin tablets. The deficiency can cause the whole or part of the body to fill with fluid, resulting in a puffy swelling. For example scrotums, which are usually somewhat elastic, would fill with fluid and swell to the size of a football'.

Speaking of his mate Johnny, Reg said: 'Johnny Gray's attack of beri beri was one of the the deceptive kind that made his formerly frail, emaciated body fill out so that he looked almost healthy, but it was to have its lethal affects. It took over Johnny's big heart and he died soon afterwards. All his courage and protestations could not save him'. (*It Happened To Us*, p. 136)

Johnny died at Chunhkia on the 9th January 1944, aged 26 years. All of the other members of the Mob finally returned home to settle in the Numurkah area.

At the time of his death he was in the company of another member of the Mob, Frank Christie. Frank later told the Gray

family that: 'On December 15th, 1943, [Johnny] was operated on for appendicitis, made a very quick recovery [and was] out of hospital in seven days. However on January 7th, 1944, [Johnny] complained of a tightness around his chest [and] went back to hospital next day, but passed away on January 9th. Death was due to Cardiac Beri Beri.' (Information given to Arch Rogers by George Gray)

We are fortunate that Frank Christie also kept a diary. This is what he wrote of the above incident as it was unfolding before him:

'1944

'January 3, Monday. ... Go and see Johnnie [sic], he blown with beri beri. ...

'January 4, Tuesday. ... Go & see Johnnie, he still bloated, ...

'January 5, Wednesday. ... Johnnie nearly passed out last night, blown up to blazes, can't breath. ...

'January 6, Thursday. ... Go & see Johnnie, he had a bad night, 4 needles, can't get breath. See Mick Wedge, he done everything he can, got another M.O. to see him. ... Go & see Johnnie again, he's a bit easier, ...

'January 7, Friday. ... Johnnie an easier night, took fluid from him last night, a bit of phlegm coming away. ...

'January 8, Saturday. ... Johnnie the same, putting up a great fight, did 1 1/2 pints of water. ...

'January 9, Sunday. ... Johnnie not a bad night, sleep till 11, then do slats for bugs, get a few. Johnnie passed away just before dinner. ... go with Des [Dawe] [to] get Johnnie's personal gear. ... Get home late. No sleep. Couldn't. ...

'January 10, Monday. ... play cards, then go to Johnnie's funeral. George Howell, Norm Hollow, Hec Nelson, Bill Dunn, Des Dawe and myself, bearers. Felt it most of all, not a person spoke coming home. Alf Maskell laid a nice

wreath made by Frank Donat. ... Great turnout at funeral, read from book [of] 'Wisdom' & Revelations. ... Johnnie's grave No 1134. ... .' (*The War Diary of VX 35135 Gunner F.W. Christie, 4th Anti Tank Regiment.*)

Frank Christie sent a secret message to his family informing them of Johnny's death, probably knowing that it would be some time before they got official word of his death from the authorities. Apparently he wrote a note in pencil then rubbed it out and wrote another note on top. Miraculously it passed the Japanese un-noticed. Jack Thornton, who was on leave at the time, says that his aunt, Margaret Christie, contacted him about the card. He confirmed her suspicions that there was a message on it and suggested taking it to the police for complete deciphering.

Johnny's brother George gave the following information about the card to Arch Rogers, first Principal of Numurkah High School. 'In January 1945, a letter card, dated January 11th, 1944, was received by the mother of Johnny's cobbler (Frank Christie of Katunga) which was noticed to have an erased message on it. This message was partly deciphered by [the Christies] who promptly took [the] card to [the] local police, who informed our parents. It was not until the card had been sent down to Russell Street Police that the complete message was brought out. [It] read:

"Sympathy to Gray family. Johnny passed away 2 days ago."

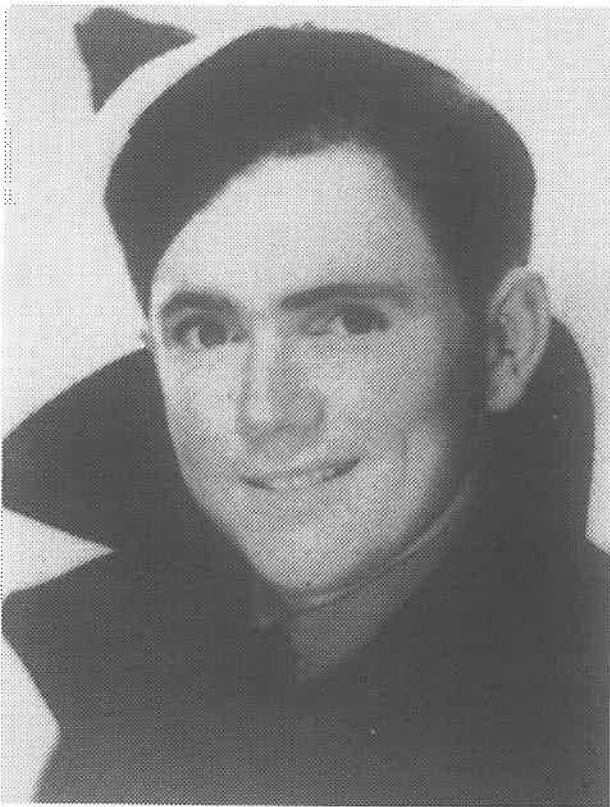
The Department of the Army would not recognise this message, so it was a further 15 - 18 months before 'official' word was received.' (Information given to Arch Rogers by George Gray.)

Johnny Gray is buried in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand.

# Gregory Herbert Hunkin

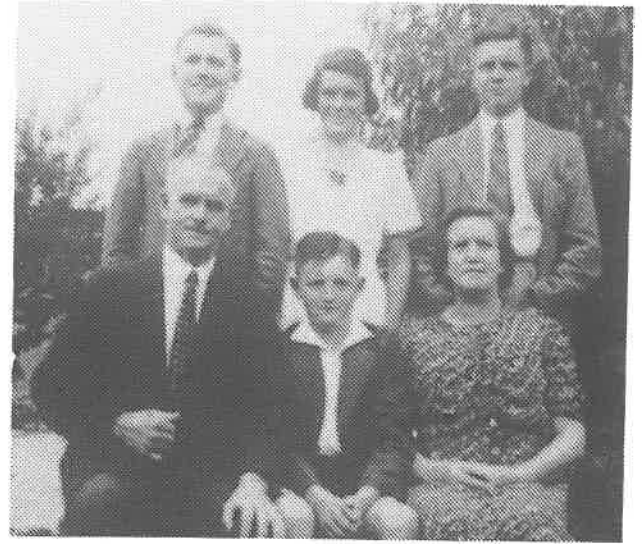
## 1924 - 1944

Greg Hunkin was a great all-rounder. He excelled in his studies, he was good on the sports field and he was good with people. He faced life with a positive, albeit realistic attitude. He really believed in doing one's best, always.



Greg Hunkin was born at Brunswick on the 20th of June, 1924. He was the second son of William H. and Evelyn Hunkin, who, with their family, moved to Numurkah in 1931.

Greg had two brothers - Bill, who was nine years older, and Edward who was three and a half years younger. Both boys were to become Methodist



The Hunkin Family, mid-1930s  
Standing: Greg, Maurine, Bill  
Seated: Mr. Hunkin, Edward, Mrs Hunkin

Ministers. He also had one sister, Maurine, who was almost two years younger than Greg. Like all good brothers he used to tease her whenever possible, but word has it that she got what she gave!

Mr. Hunkin, who was a Methodist lay preacher and a member of the School Committee, owned a variety store in Melville Street, just north of the Court House - 'Nothing over 2/6d!' (at least in the early years) - where you could buy almost anything. At Christmas-time the shop's basement became a place to see Santa, much to the delight of the children.

To subsidize the income of the shop Mrs. Hunkin took in boarders, students from the Higher Elementary School who lived out of town. Today, with school buses, it seems silly that students from as close to town as Strathmerton, Invergordon, Baulkamaugh, etc., would need to board in Numurkah during the week, but in those days it was quite common.

Greg was good looking, five foot five and a half inches tall, and well built.



He was health conscious and ensured that he did physical exercise to maintain his physique. He had dark hair and dark eyes. What he lacked in height he made up for in other ways. He is remembered as a good all-rounder - good at sport, a good student and easy to get along with. He was liked by everyone.



Greg and Maurine circa 1930

He was a fun-loving, happy boy with a great sense of humour. He loved life. His eyes were always laughing and had a roguish twinkle that gave away his love for practical jokes. Yet despite his love of fun he was quiet by nature.

Although he had many friends, his best friends were Keith Cowan and John Rendell. Both boys boarded with the Hunkins during the week while attending the Higher Elementary School and Greg often spent the weekends on their farms.

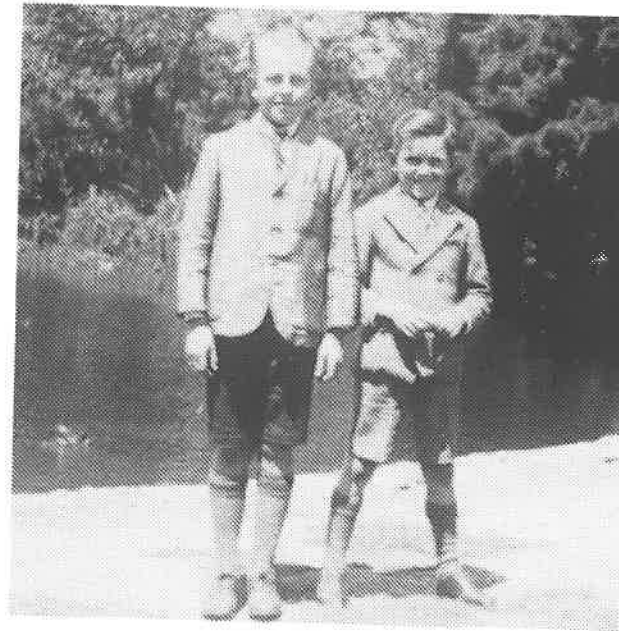
Greg attended Numurkah Primary School followed by four years at Numurkah Higher Elementary School, where he received his Intermediate Certificate.

He was a very bright, conscientious

student. He always competed for first place in class against Bette Moss (Miss Keith McKeown), Dorothy Miller (Miss Colin Patrick) and Charlie Watter throughout his Higher Elementary School years in Numurkah. His penmanship was very good and he won prizes for his handwriting at the Numurkah Show.

Like many boys Greg was involved in Cubs and Scouts and he also enjoyed photography. He liked to be active.

When he was about ten years old Greg displayed his ingenuity as 'editor and illustrator' of a paper called the *Myrniong News* (Myrniong being the name of the family house at the time) which he sold for a penny a copy to the neighbours to raise pocket money.



Greg (right) and his cousin, Max McAllister

He enjoyed playing cricket, football and tennis. His sister Maurine recalls that 'the dents in a certain tin fence in Quinn Street, where we lived before moving to Melville Street, were evidence of the many hours we played cricket together'.

Greg also loved music and he and his sister often sang duets during sing-songs after church. Maurine said

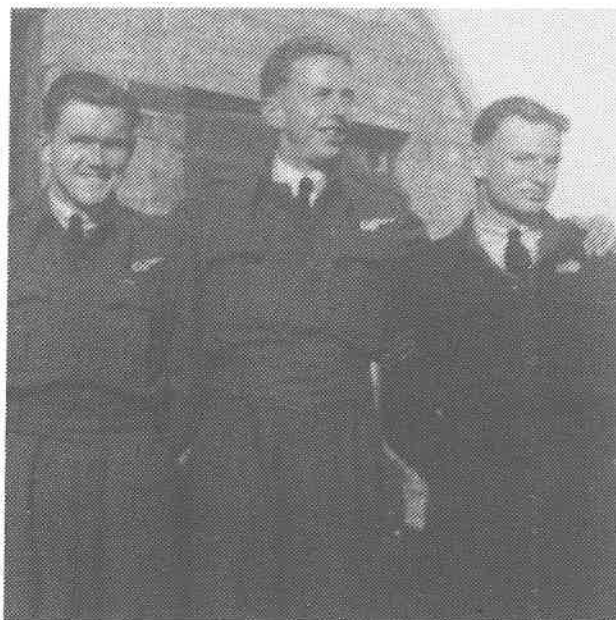
that one of his dreams came true 'when he actually heard the Boston Promenade Orchestra, live, play *'The Blue Danube Waltz'* by Strauss while in America en route to England'.

In 1938 he was awarded a scholarship which enabled him to complete his education at Melbourne Boy's High School, from which he matriculated.

While studying at Melbourne High Greg met Mary Miller through the local Methodist Church, where they both sang in the choir. She was two years Greg's junior. They became firm friends and spent much time together, both in Melbourne and in Numurkah. It is presumed by all who knew them that, had circumstances been different, they would have spent the rest of their lives together. Mary had a magnificent, pure singing voice and on Greg's request she recorded the song *'Tristesse'* which she sent to him in England. Unfortunately the record was never returned with his things. Mary went on to win the *'Sun Aria'* in 1948. Sadly she died of cancer in January, 1949, at the age of twenty two.



Mary Miller circa 1948



Greg (left) and two mates, England, 1943

In January 1942 Greg commenced working as a junior teacher at School No. 4309 Bell Street Coburg. However, on July 20th of that year, shortly after his eighteenth birthday, he enlisted as air crew in the R.A.A.F.

He was patriotic and very loyal. He strongly believed that it was his obligation to be involved in the war effort.

Greg trained at Mt. Gambier and Pt. Pirie in South Australia. On the 1st of April, 1943, he was mustered as navigator with the rank of Sergeant and embarked for England on May 5th.. He served in England flying Anson, Wellington, Halifax and Lancaster bombers. On the 1st of October he was promoted to the rank of Flight Sergeant.

When Greg left for overseas he wrote his letters in diary form, requesting his parents to keep them for future reference after the war. Among other things his letters home told of the beauty of England during the changing seasons and of the hospitality of the families of his crew who lived there and of others he met along the way. His friendliness made him a welcome guest.

In February 1944 Greg wrote the following which his parents sent to the editor of *The Methodist Spectator*. It was published anonymously shortly after Greg was reported missing in action. It gives a great deal of insight into Greg's character and maturity.

Castle Donnington  
4/2/44

Dearest Mum and Dad,

*I am writing this entirely without premonition. I have weighed everything carefully. I feel that I should write this, although it must necessitate upsetting you afresh - after everything was settled down.*

*I am writing this merely to ascertain that you know my innermost feelings, dear Mother and Father, should anything happen to me. It is a possibility, as you, no doubt, realise as well as I do.*

*I want you to understand this - I attribute all my happiness, my peace of mind, and all my honourable actions, thoughts and words to your parentage and upbringing.*

*I must always feel the same about my home life and the home guidance which means everything to anyone about my age.*

*I therefore, Mum and Dad, feel I must thank you for the home and its environments into which I was brought. I can never forget Mother's love and care and watchfulness, and your quiet but sure teachings, Dad, as I watched you both following my development through the early years of my life with proud eyes. I've tried hard to deserve those fond glances of pride you could not hide. Perhaps I may have deserved them, perhaps I didn't, but they helped me.*

*Like all of us young people, I hope Great*

*War II benefits the world instead of repeating the tragedy of Great War I. How I hope the lives that have been sacrificed in this futility have not been lost in vain. Let us hope it won't be too far ahead to the day when we shall attain the dreams of all - a world of peace and prosperity.*

*Well Mum and Dad, that's all. Let us offer these words to one who is listening, and comforting:*

*"Drop Thy still dews of quietness until our strivings cease,  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace."*

*Yours ever affectionately,*

*Greg*



Greg studying charts prior to a mission

On May 11th, 1944, Greg was transferred to the famous 460 R.A.A.F. Lancaster Squadron stationed at R.A.F. Bomber Command, Binbrook, England, flying on night raids to Germany. This

Heavy Duty Bomber Squadron participated in all of the major battles over Europe during World War II and finished with an operational record second to none. However Greg's letters home now began to convey a sense of sadness and disillusionment as so many of his friends failed to return from raids on France and Germany. He hated dropping those bombs and longed for home.

work of Bomber Command, for whilst the gun emplacements built in thick encasements of concrete were not all knocked out, the effect the attacks had on stunning the German troops manning them was of incalculable value. Some batteries did not fire at all, some only spasmodically, whilst others did engage the landing forces to their fullest extent.

'After the landing, the squadron



Greg (centre) with mates giving the 'thumbs up' sign

In *Strike and Return*, Peter Firkins states: 'The first days of June brought little relief to the German defensive positions as Bomber Command pounded away at them. ... [On the night of June 5th] as the men of the airborne divisions were getting ready to board their gliders [for their part in the D-Day operations, June 6th,] above them, through the dark night roared the heavy bombers to give the Atlantic Wall one final blast before the troops went in. The amazingly low casualties suffered by the invasion troops was a direct compliment to the

continued with its contribution to the general policy of close support to the liberating armies, with the lightest losses it had suffered for a very long time.' Firkins, P. *Strike and Return*, p. 146)

Continuing, Firkins states that 'June was really a momentous month for [the] 460, because, apart from the joy it shared with the rest of the allied world in the successful invasion of Europe, it created another Bomber Command record by dropping 1,562 tons of bombs, the heaviest monthly tonnage dropped by



one squadron'. (Firkins, P. *Strike and Return*, p. 147)

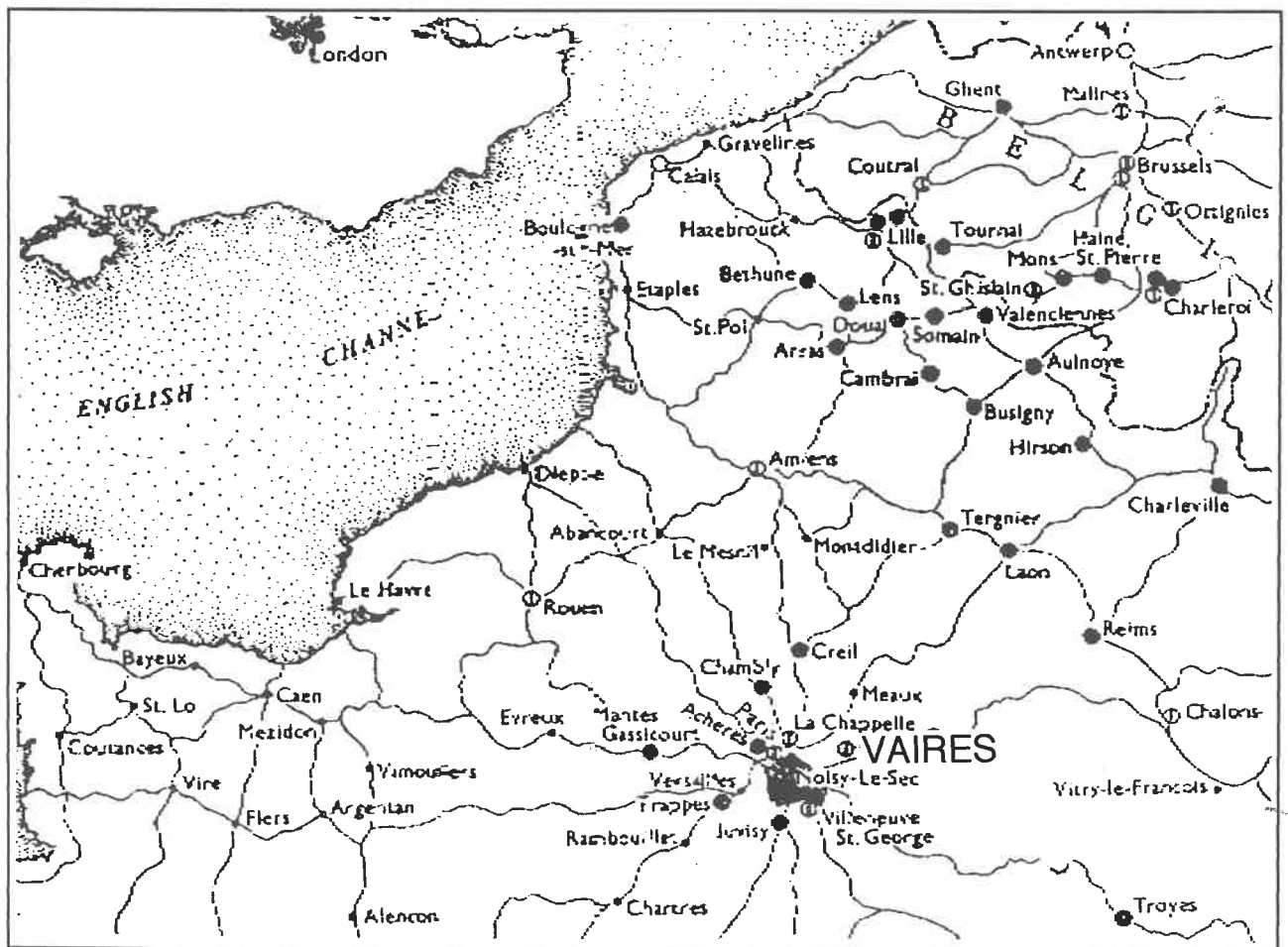
Greg's log book indicates that he did participate in the pre D-Day raids and in the heavy bombing mentioned by Firkins. As bomb aimer on Jack Israel's crew he also took part in missions to Reims and Boulogne.

On the night of June 27th, just seven days after his twentieth birthday, Greg took part in an attack on Vaires (sur Marne), in France, an important rail centre on the Paris - Meaux through line. It was his tenth mission.

John Herington records that: '[B]etween 13th and 30th June R.A.F. Bomber Command carried out 16 raids against rail choke points during which 1,774

aircraft were dispatched, 1,614 bombed their targets and 5,620 tons of bombs were dropped. ... The Australian heavy-bomber squadrons joined in only six, all in the latter part of the month: No. 460 attacking Reims (22nd - 23rd), Vaires (27th - 28th) and Vierzon (30th June - 1st July); ... In all the R.A.A.F. Squadrons sent out 139 aircraft. Enemy defences were patchy but over the whole series of raids 65 aircraft were lost, the worst casualties being sustained during the deep penetration to Vierzon when 14 out of 118 Lancasters were shot down'. (John Herington, *Air Power Over Europe*, p. 158.)

Sadly Greg's Lancaster was one of the 65 which failed to return and he was reported 'missing in action, presumed dead' on the 28th June 1944.



Map showing the location of Vaires (sur Marne), the target of Greg's fatal mission, which was severely damaged by allied bombing



# Charles Joseph Tweddle 1916 - 1942

Charlie Tweddle was a quiet, hard working young man. He was devoted to his family and to the land which he loved and worked most strenuously and untiringly. Love of family, hard work and service to all was his motto.



**B**orn at Shepparton on February 18th, 1916, Charles, who was always called Charlie, was the eldest son of John Charles and Mabel Tweddle. There were six children in the family: Mabel, Charlie, Viola, Ivan, Beryl and Reg.

When Charlie was ten the Tweddle



Charlie, aged about six months

family moved from their property in Kialla to a farm at Baulkamaugh.

While the children attended school the Tweddles lived in Numurkah. Their house is still on its large block at No. 4 Murray avenue. Early each day John Charles would go out to the farm and tend to work there, returning in the evenings, leaving Mabel to tend to the children and her many household responsibilities. Outside of school hours the Tweddle children spent their time helping Mum or playing with their neighbours, the Stringers, the Hydes, and the Cattanachs. Cricket was one of their favourite activities

The family were strict Methodists and were well respected in the Numurkah District. John Charles was the Sunday School Superintendent for many years.



Grade 6, Numurkah Primary School, circa 1928. Charlie is seated first on the left, cross-legged

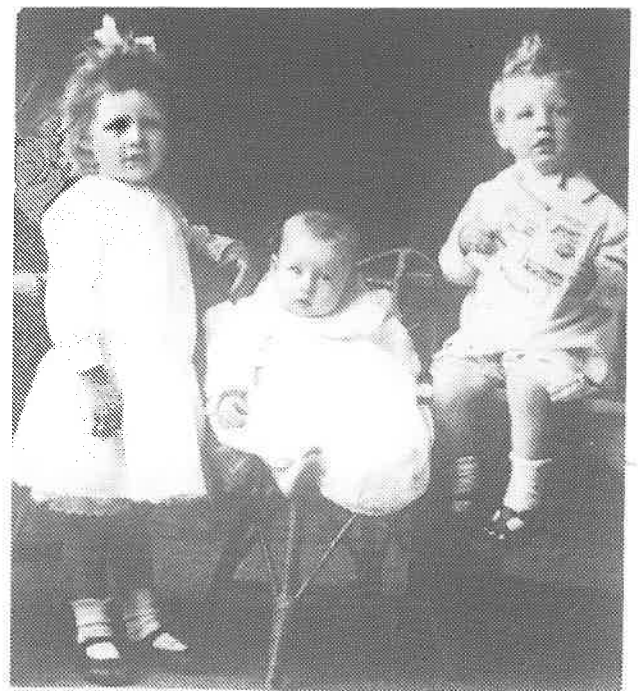
Much, if not all of their social activity centred on the Numurkah Methodist Church. But for the most part their farm and their immediate family were the most important things in their lives.

Charlie was a good-looking, tall young man. He had light brown hair and blue eyes. He had a good physique, although like many boys he went through the stage of being all arms and legs. He was good at all sports, especially swimming which he thoroughly enjoyed. He was also a keen cricketer, an expert horseman and a crack shot with a rifle.

Of a serious nature, he was not very confident socially yet he loved to help people and was a good Christian.

Charlie commenced his education at Kialla Primary School and continued at Numurkah Primary School. He went on to finish his education at the Numurkah Higher Elementary School, receiving his Merit Certificate.

Charlie's school friends included Norm Blake, Brian Bitcon, Jack Murray, Johnny Gray, Frank Rowe, Fred Thomas, Maurie Prideaux, Cliff Moss, Alex Baker, Bob and Russell Hendy, Bill McBride, Frank Christie and Jack Thornton. Normally a quiet boy he once



Mabel, Viola and Charlie circa 1918

got 'the cuts' from the Headmaster for silly behaviour in the corridor. Apparently he and Jack Thornton were following each other at a rapid pace down the corridor when one jumped on the other's back for a piggy-back ride (Jack assumes that it was he who jumped on Charlie's back because he, Jack, was often into mischief!) Unfortunately the Headmaster came out of his office at the wrong time and promptly dealt with their restless behaviour.



Charlie riding his favourite horse, Polly

Upon concluding his education Charlie took up farming on the family property, initially baching by himself and then later with his brother Ivan. Living alone on the farm he learnt to cook and fend for himself. Like many of his peers he was good with his hands and able to improvise in order to get the work done. In fact he was a very practical, hard working, down to earth young man.



Charlie and Reg having fun in a bathtub on the farm dam

Charlie took great pride in cropping the family's land, using the only available source of power - horses, which he loved, breaking in young ones as required for farm work. He often rode his favourite, Polly, into Numurkah. Responsibilities on the farm and to his family precluded him from joining the local C.M.F. Light Horse unit attended by many of his acquaintances.

In addition to riding he loved shooting and spent his few free moments hunting



Reg, Viola, Charlie, Beryl and Ivan circa 1940





Charlie's Platoon

Bill Saxton is first on the left and Charlie is second from the right, back row

rabbits, foxes and other pests with his brother Ivan. He also liked relaxing in the dam, especially on hot days.

His sister Beryl recalls that the boys 'had a unique alarm while baching on the family property. They were awakened every morning at around 4.30 by a big, old Tabby cat who jumped through the open window and slapped the boys' faces with his paw until they woke up'.

When war broke out Charlie felt it was his duty to join up and in July, 1940, he enlisted in the 2nd/22nd Infantry Battalion, 2nd A.I.F. He completed his basic training at the Caulfield Race Course in August of that year and was involved in subsequent training at Wangaratta, Darley and Albury.

In April, 1941, his battalion embarked for Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, to take up defensive positions. As a member of the 2nd/22nd Charlie was one of the many who made up Lark Force. This Force also included

signallers, infantry and engineers from other battalions.

On the 22nd of January 1942 the Japanese 'swept south to the island of New Britain and landed strong forces to seize the key harbour of Rabaul. Out-numbered twenty to one, a garrison of 1,400 Australian troops [including Charlie] at first fought desperately [but] they were overwhelmed by 25,000 Japanese. ... Their 'coastal defenses' had been two rejected naval guns; ... their 'air support' had been nine obsolescent planes; ... their plan of action had never envisaged retreat. ... [Eventually] four hundred-odd men escaped and fled along the coasts ... westward [through the jungles]'. (White, O. *Green Armour*, p.18)

'[All those who escaped, including Charlie's mate Bill Saxton,] suffered severely from sickness, lack of medicines, food, clothing and shelter.

'The Japanese force continually rounded



Bill Saxton (left) and Charlie, wearing Col McPherson's slouch hat, early 1941

up and imprisoned both civilians and servicemen until hundreds were held as prisoners of war in Rabaul. ... [Some were not so lucky and were brutally massacred as in the massacre] at 'Tol Plantation' where 161 were taken into the jungle and executed.' (Smith, J. "The *Montevideo Story*" - a talk given at a Memorial Service on the 50th Anniversary of the Sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* held at St. Peter's Church, East Bentleigh.)

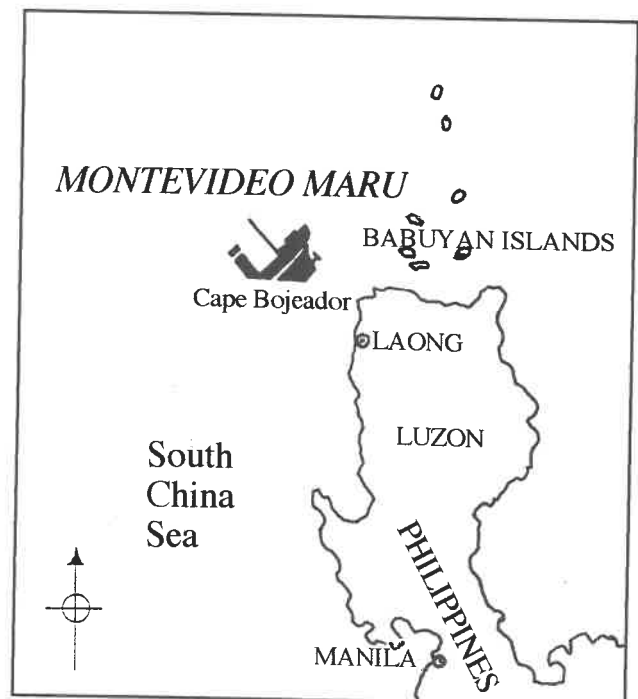
Charlie, who was then 26, was one of those who was captured. Further in his address at the memorial service Jim Smith said: 'On June 22nd, 1942, the prisoners of war at Rabaul were awakened by Japanese guards. The officers [together with nurses and some civilians] were separated from the other ranks. The men [including Charlie] were loaded onto the transport *Montevideo Maru* [together with their gear] ... to be used as slave labour in Japan.

'On board the *Montevideo Maru* the prisoners were crowded in to the hold in less than humane conditions and the holds were battened down. A total of 1053 prisoners, comprising 873

servicemen and 180 civilians [were on board].'

On the 1st of July, 1942, the *Montevideo Maru* was torpedoed 60 miles off the coast of Luzon Island in the Phillipines by an American submarine, the USS Sturgeon, which, seeing an unmarked Japanese vessel, fired four torpedoes. As a result the ship sank in only six minutes and all the prisoners on board were lost at sea. Those Japanese sailors who survived were rescued and taken prisoner.

Due to a number of circumstances, information of this disaster was much delayed and the relatives of those on board had to wait almost four years before Australia's Acting Prime Minister announced the fate of those lost on the *Montevideo Maru* in October, 1945. This of course included members of Charlie's family who, until that time, only knew that he had been 'lost at sea', although some members of his family were unaware of his actual fate until just recently.



Location of the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*



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*NUMURKAH  
HIGHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
ROLL OF THOSE WHO PAID THE  
SUPREME SACRIFICE  
IN THE  
SECOND WORLD WAR  
1939 - 1945*

*Cyril Dempster  
Colin Flack  
John Gray  
Bruce Haynes  
Geoffrey Hendy  
Gregory Hunkin  
Reginald Krutli  
Norman Lease  
Vernon 'Peter' Lee  
Graham O'Brien  
William Osborne  
Charles Tweddle  
Alan Vickerman*

Information based on Numurkah  
Hospital and Town Memorials  
and cross-referenced with  
School Records

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