

AWM 65

[221]

BARTLE, JOHN PHILIP

406171

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
ACCESS STATUS

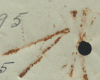
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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

Photo UK 895

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, London.

Photographed UK 895



SURNAME..... BARTLE NUMBER..... H06171

CHRISTIAN NAMES..... JOHN PAULIP

AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING..... SF PILOT Comm. 1941

DEGREES ETC..... 24-12-41 11 PDR C 1742-44

DATE OF BIRTH..... 6-6-15 PLACE..... GOOLGARDIE, W.A.

EDUCATED..... BUNBURY HIGH SCHOOL, W.A.

DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE..... 12 AUG 40

PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE..... 10 LIGHT HORSE REGT

PLACES OF TRAINING..... SOMERS ESSENDON WAGGA

CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES..... STOCKS STATION
WAROONA W.A.

SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED) CLUBS ETC.....
.....

FATHER.....
.....

WIFE..... NANCY HAIR

HOME ADDRESS..... WAROONA W.A.

SIGNATURE..... [Signature]

DATE..... 10-1-44

DATE OF EMBARKATION..... MAY 41

HEADQUARTERS USE ONLY - DO NOT FILL IN

AWARDS..... 1928/1940 DFC

CATEGORY..... INTERVIEWS.....
.....

RADIO..... M.F. Encs: 258

OTHER REFERENCES..... See M.F. file Encs 169
✓ 139C, 140D, 141B, 142B, 139C
144C, 169C, 172B, 183A-199B

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

450 Sqn.
ME

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, London.

SURNAME..... BARTHENUMBER..... 406171

CHRISTIAN NAMES..... JACK Phillip (John)

AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING..... F/Lt A/S/Lt Comm. 1941

DEGREES ETC.....

DATE OF BIRTH..... PLACE.....

EDUCATED.....

DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE.....

PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE.....

PLACES OF TRAINING.....

CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES.....

.....

SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED) CLUBS ETC.....

.....

FATHER.....

WIFE.....

HOME ADDRESS..... LEEDERVILLE, W. AUSTRALIA

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

DATE OF EMBARKATION.....

HEADQUARTERS USE ONLY - DO NOT FILL IN

AWARDS..... 182^a 176^a D.F.C. Mentioned in Despatches June 1943

CATEGORY..... INTERVIEWS.....

.....

RADIO..... OTHER REFERENCES..... FIVE 184/131/AIR

..... (PUNIAITY FROM ME ENG. UK^a)

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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE OVERSEAS HEADQUARTERS

R.A.A.F. Bulletin No. 317

10 February, 1944.

AUSTRALIANS AT INVESTITURE

Note to Australian Press.

At the next Investiture, the following members of the R.A.A.F. are listed to appear:-

- Squadron Leader John Phillip Bartle, D.F.C.
- Squadron Leader Mervyn Powell, D.F.C.
- Flight Lieutenant Arthur Leslie Mervyn Spurgin, D.F.C.
- Flight Lieutenant Maxwell Stanley Bainprize, D.F.C.
- Flight Lieutenant James Clark, D.F.C.
- Flying Officer John Edward Harold Morris, D.F.C.
- Flying Officer Ronald Frederick Friend, D.F.C.
- Pilot Officer Royds Molyneux Carvin, D.F.C.

Details are as follows:-

Squadron Leader John Phillip Bartle

To be invested with the D.F.C., awarded in January, 1944.

Citation: "This officer has completed many hours of operational flying during the campaigns in the Western Desert, Sicily and Italy. He has completed many attacks and has led sorties which have produced excellent results causing the destruction of large numbers of enemy vehicles and heavy damage to dumps, shipping, camps, and installations. During the enemy evacuation of Sicily, Squadron Leader Bartle with outstanding courage led his squadron on several attacks on Messina harbour in the course of which five enemy ships were sunk and others damaged".

Squadron Leader Bartle was born on 6 June, 1916, at Coolgardie, Western Australia. He was educated at Bunbury High School, Western Australia, and in civil life worked on a stock station. He served in the 10th Light Horse Regiment before joining the R.A.A.F. on 12 August, 1940. He was trained in Australia under the Joint Air Training Plan, was commissioned in 1941, and mentioned in despatches in June, 1943. His home is at Waroona, Western Australia.

Once, in February 1942, between El Adhem and Bir Hakeim, 2 squadrons of Kittyhawks which he was leading shot down -- without loss to themselves -- 20 enemy aircraft. In addition to commanding a Desert Kittyhawk Squadron, he commanded, prior to the fall of Tripoli, the Australian Air Ambulance unit.

406171 S/L J. P. Bartle D. F. C.

Completed two operational tours - one as C. O. of Australian Squadron 450 - in the Middle East often flying in company with aircraft from American Fighter Groups 57 and 79, also using Kittyhawks.

Probably one of the best 'shows' of the three units - Nos. 450, 57 and 79 - was the successful strafing of enemy troops in the El Hamma ravine - a strafing which lead to the successful outflanking of the Mareth Line ~~with~~ by the New Zealanders. On that occasion, Bartle lead the Americans into battle.

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

7/1/44.

1828.

Acting S/Ldr John Phillip BARTLE, Royal Australian Air Force, No. 450 Squadron.
This officer has completed many hours of operational flying during the campaigns in the Western Desert, Sicily and Italy. He has completed many attacks and has led sorties which have produced excellent results causing the destruction of large numbers of enemy vehicles and heavy damage to dumps, shipping, camps and installations. During the enemy evacuation of Sicily Squadron Leader Bartle with outstanding courage led his squadron on several attacks on Messina harbour in the course of which five enemy ships were sunk and others damaged.

AS BROADCAST:
Rec.: DLO 49278
Dur.: 12'10" (P.T.)

PRODUCER: DAVID BERNARD
AUTHOR: DAVID BERNARD

"WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITAIN"

Personal file

Speaker: Aus. 406171 S/Ldr. J.P. Bartle, D.F.C. (No. 450 Squadron.)

Home Town: Waroona, Western Australia.

Censored by: R.S. LEE.

Tuesday 15th February 1944. 08.45 - 09.00 GMT. PACIFIC.

ANNOUNCER:

This is London Calling in the Pacific Service. Today Squadron Leader J.P. Bartle, D.F.C. will talk to you about air support to the Eighth Army in Africa, Sicily and Italy. Squadron Leader Bartle has served three tours in the R.A.A.F. - two operational tours with the Desert Air Force and one 'non-operational' tour with an R.A.A.F. Ambulance Squadron. He comes from Waroona in Western Australia and expects to be going home quite soon. He has had a fund of operational experience in support of the Eighth Army, so is in an excellent position to give you a picture of the work of the Air Force that supported, and still supports, that great Army - from El Alamein to Tunisia, Sicily and now Italy. Squadron Leader Bartle.....

S/L.BARTLE:

Perhaps I'm a bit biased, but since I've done two operational and one non-operational tour with fighter bombers in support of the Eighth Army I don't think there is any more exciting job in the Air Force.

It was in July 1941 that I joined 112 R.A.F. Squadron in the Middle East. We were equipped with Tomshawks and were using them as fighters. You may remember seeing pictures of these Tomshawks - we painted their noses to look like sharks' faces with a wide gaping mouth and enormous white teeth which earned us the name of the 'Shark' Squadron! Then, we were given Kittyhawks which is a modified version of a Tomshawk and it has the advantage of being able to carry a bomb load as well as being able to act as an ordinary fighter. We painted

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sharks faces on the Kittyhawks as well, but because of the difference in the design of the fuselage, they didn't look quite so terrifying!

We were providing close support to our armies in the Desert during that difficult time when we were doing more retreating than advancing, and I always regret that my first tour finished before our last and final attack at El Alamein. However, during my rest period I took over an Ambulance Squadron which was manned by personnel from the R.A.A.F. I found that I was actually seeing more of our side of the campaign than I might have, had I still been with fighter bombers. These air ambulances were old two-wing passenger planes that you'd see running on the shorter air routes in peace-time. But one of their greatest assets is the fact that they can land in a very small area. We would fly up to just behind the front line where the Army would have scratched a little runway...pick up the more serious of the casualties and fly them straight back to Cairo. Quite often, the sappers would clear a path in the middle of a mined airfield and we'd use that as a runway - you'd certainly have to be careful not to go off that runway! We landed once between our own frontline and the enemy's - that was when the New Zealand Division outflanked Rommel's Boys - and we managed to get a good number of New Zealand casualties back to hospital in a remarkably short space of time.

So all in all, even though I wasn't flying over the enemy's lines, I got a first-class picture of the break-through at El Alamein and that magnificent sweep along the coast to Tripoli. We followed the advance all the way to Tripoli and it was there I finished my 'non-operational' tour with Air Ambulance and took over command of 450 R.A.A.F. Squadron.

This Squadron was known as the 'Berserker' Squadron. It adopted that name in a rather odd way...Lord Haw Haw broadcasting one night described how the German troops were continually being harassed by Australian airmen, and so having been given such a name by the enemy, we adopted it.

The Desert Air Force by now was a very formidable fighting unit and the efficiency of its co-operation with the Eighth Army was well high perfect.

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One very good thing that was done and is still being done by the Eighth Army and its supporting Air Force, is to attach a few pilots to the Army and a few Army officers to the Squadrons. This enables us both to see just how the other side works, and through living with the Army, we in the Air Force soon learn their difficulties, and what's more, we learn to appreciate and respect these difficulties. The same applies to the Army officers with us. I, myself, have been in the front line - on the ground I mean - and I've seen attacks on close targets by Kittyhawks. They look terrific from the ground and I was very glad I wasn't on the receiving end!

As you know, our aircraft are called Kittyhawks. That's a very apt name because when you're flying over enemy lines you feel just like a hawk. You're looking down waiting to catch a glimpse of a target and when you see it, you drop down on it in a screaming dive for all the world like some 'mechanised' bird of prey.

You see chaps diving out of lorries into the ditches and at the same time, cattle and sheep peacefully grazing in the adjacent fields. That's always been a curious thing to me, but it certainly is a fact. I've bombed and strafed enemy positions that were dug in the corner of a field and cattle grazing only a few yards away haven't turned round to look at me. Sheep occasionally run when you roar over them, but by the time you've circled and come back, there they are nibbling away at the grass quite unconcerned.

Our tasks were varied...we'd bomb enemy gun positions and tank concentrations, and strafe and bomb transport coming up behind the enemy lines.

Here, in as much detail as I can give you, is what happens during an average twenty-four hours.

At night, the Army and Air Force Commanders meet and discuss the following day's operations. Between them, with the information they have at hand, they decide what targets behind the enemy lines we will strafe the following day. It might be a road that is being used to bring down supplies, or a series of enemy gun positions, machine-gun nests or troop concentrations. Then, a certain number of aircraft are

detailed to stand by for any calls for close support that the Army might make. So, the next day finds aircraft flying well behind the enemy lines on strafing and bombing sorties, and others waiting at readiness by their machines. If the Army is held up by opposition that they themselves can't deal with - it might be an enemy battery that because of its position cannot be engaged by our own artillery - the Army Commander on the spot then sends back a call for air support. This call is received by an Army Liaison Officer who is attached to our wing. He then gives us a very thorough briefing - indicating the target to us on the map - and giving us the exact position of our foremost troops...this last is very important as you can well realise, and it is to our great credit that the Eighth Army had such confidence in us that they would call for us to bomb and strafe targets at very, very short distances from their foremost troops. Our planes were, of course, already fuelled and bombed up, so we'd take off practically straight away. I would then lead the Squadron to the target...we'd get into echelon formation, one behind the other, then I'd peel off and go screaming down into a dive-bombing attack on the target, and the rest of the Squadron would follow hot on my heels. When we'd pulled out of the dive, we'd circle and come back at tree-top height to give the enemy position a damn good strafing. That form of attack generally turned them up all right.

During this time those aircraft detailed for special sorties would have been out bombing their targets. On the way back to base we often fly low and have a good look at what is going on behind the enemy's lines. Naturally, if we have enough ammunition we shoot up any targets we come across.. motor cycles are quite fun because they don't hear you coming! Very often pilots report when we get back to base..."I saw about fifty lorries tail to nose on the road leading down to Tarano. Can we go back and have a crack at them?". Or again, we might be able to supply information which the Army and Air Force Commanders will use in planning future sorties.

One of the biggest shows we put on was at Mareth. Our Armies were held up by very stiff opposition and the only way to effect a breakthrough was to outflank the Mareth line. This task was allotted to the

New Zealand Division. Their only out-flanking route was through a narrow defile, and the Germans had machine-gun nests in great numbers and heavy artillery ready to bring murderous fire on the valley below. For the New Zealanders to attempt any sort of charge through this defile without air support would have been nothing short of suicidal. But the entire Desert Air Force Group concentrated on this area and gave the Germans three intense hours of dive-bombing and strafing. It was one of the most impressive sights I've ever seen....the New Zealanders advanced up the defile with our aircraft thundering overhead, attacking the enemy positions that were immediately menacing them until eventually they reached the end of the defile and the Mareth Line had been turned!

Airfields were a bit of a problem. In order to keep pace with and provide adequate support to the Eighth Army, we always had our airfields quite far forward.....often within range of the enemy's artillery. The Royal Engineers made these airfields for us - if the ground was flat they just marked four corners of a fairly large square, and that was our airfield! If there were any big bumps in the ground they'd run a bulldozer over them and clear a sort of runway. In the light of the airfields that I've seen here in England, it all seems rather Heath Robinson, but there is no doubt it was effective.

There were no hangers - our planes were serviced in the open. It says a great deal for the ground crews - these men who work tirelessly, and very often under appalling conditions and without the glories of those who fly - that our aircraft were serviced and repaired with all the care and skill we'd get if we were flying from the latest commercial aerodrome. This was no easy job. Sand and dust was continually blowing over our Kittyhawks, engines were changed in the dust. The ground crews worked through the night with the dim light of blacked-out torches in the dust - shot-up aircraft were patched up and made serviceable again after a few hours - they were bombed-up and re-fuelled and all the while the ground crews were working, sleeping and eating in the sand and dust.

I said it was often a hard job to keep pace with the advancing Eighth Army. Often we leap-frogged our airfields. We'd send a handful

of men to just behind the forward troops with the bare essentials of stores, bombs and fuel. We'd take off from the rear airfields, doing a sortie over the enemy lines, and land at the forward airfield where we could ready for the next sortie. Quite often our aircraft were re-fuelled from petrol cans - it takes 25 cans of petrol to fill an aircraft for an average sortie and it takes about an hour to do it! Meanwhile the rest of our equipment would have come up to the forward airfield and we'd be ready for the next move. And so it went on through Libya and into Tunisia.

After Tunisia, we began to prepare for the invasion of Sicily. Our Squadron went to Malta and from there we bombed and strafed enemy positions in Sicily during the landing of our Army. It was very crowded in Malta with hundreds of aircraft operating, so as soon as the Army had cleared an airfield on a corner of Sicily, we moved in there. Our ground crews had already arrived in Sicily from landing barges and they had everything turned up for us. During the Sicilian campaign, we gave support to the Eighth Army which was advancing along the coast road to Catania at the foot of Mount Etna. It called for very accurate bombing to dislodge the enemy gun positions that had been dug into the sides of the mountain. At the same time, we were carrying out sorties to disorganise the enemy's transport and supplies which were coming down the West side of Italy.

There was a very attractive winter sports chalet about six thousand feet up the side of Mount Etna....we'd seen it several times when we'd been flying around, so when our troops had driven the enemy out of Sicily, I sent a couple of pilots who'd finished their tour to go and see what this chalet was like. The old Sicilian caretaker was still there, and we hired some Elytic waiters and turned this chalet into a rest camp. We bought a couple of bullocks and after having lived on bully beef for so long, we naturally made the most of that fresh meat - as a matter of fact, we ate great juicy steaks for days. When we left Sicily, the R.A.F. took over our chalet and turned it into a convalescent home. It was lovely up there - 6,000 feet above the heat and stench of the plain that had been a battlefield, and the cool air of the

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Mediterranean night was sweet to us after the hot, fetid breath of the Desert.

With Sicily over, it was on again across the Straits of Messina following the Eighth Army into Italy. We flew in ground crews by transport plane and our Kittyhawks were flying on sorties just one hour after they'd landed there. One of the best attacks we did was on two enemy ships which were bringing vital supplies to an enemy occupied port about a hundred miles north-east of us. Eighteen direct hits were scored on these ships by ten of our aircraft. That was a good show!

From there we followed the Eighth Army to Italy and it was there that I left the Squadron and came to England as I had by this time finished my second tour of operations. I've been here for a month now and all the myriad of experiences that I had in the two-and-a-half years when we were supporting the Eighth Army have slipped into the past - for good I am afraid because I am now being sent back home to do a job there. But I shall never forget the grand lot of chaps on 450 Squadron, the great comradeship we had together, both in the sky and on the ground. I was more than sorry to part with so many great friends and I can only hope I'll meet up with them again before too long.

ANNOUNCER:

You have been listening to Squadron Leader Bartle who comes from Waroona in Western Australia, talking to you about his experience with the Air Force that supports the Eighth Army. Next week at the same time you will hear 'Anzacs Calling Home' and the week after that, Lieut. G.E. Riches who comes from Darwin will talk to you about his life as mate of a ship in the Pacific before the war, and as a captain of an Admiralty trawler based in Iceland during the war.

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Few Australians serving in the Mediterranean theatre have an operational record surpassing that of Squadron Leader Jack Bartle, who this week handed over command of the desert Harrasser fighter bomber squadron to a fellow Australian, Squadron Leader S.G. Welshman, D.F.M., of Newcastle, former Commanding Officer of a reconnaissance flight.

It was Bartle who led the first two Kitty-bomber raids back in April last year. Since then the fighter bomber has become an instrument of warfare appreciated by our own side and feared by the enemy. It was Bartle too who took two squadrons of Kittyhawks in February 1942 when the Kitties ran into an equal force of Macchis and Messerschmitts and shot 20 of them out of the sky with no loss to the Kittyhawks. It is believed that this still stands as a combat record in any war zone. "Like shooting ducks" is the way Bartle described that dog fight which took place between El Adon and Bir Hakeim over Treigh Capuzzo road where the enemy were strafing our M.T.'s. At that time Bartle was acting C.O. of an R.A.F. squadron and with him on the sortie was an all-Australian squadron belonging to the same wing. In less time than it takes to tell, 20 enemy fighters were flaming wrecks on the ground and Bartle with one gun working was chasing one of the three survivors back to Talmi. When he turned and flew back to his own base Bartle passed low over the heads of our own troops who stood cheering madly and throwing their hats in the air.

When he left that squadron in June last year after having served with it for 12 months Bartle went to A.H.Q., Levant, as staff officer and remained in that post for six months before becoming C.O. of Communications Flight in Levant. After six weeks that flight was recalled to Egypt. A fortnight before our push started to Alamein he took command of the Australian Air Ambulance unit.

Many a badly wounded man whose chance of recovery seemed small lived to bless the work of ~~six~~ the pilots and personnel of that unit, during the advance through the desert. They operated from forward landing grounds. Our fighters and on one occasion Bartle and other members of the unit flew beyond the front line to pick up some badly wounded New Zealanders.

That was between Marble Arch and Sirte when our front line ~~at~~

was at Oersa Brega. Outflanking the enemy positions, the New Zealanders had reached Nofilia where their sappers had cleared a strip on a heavily mined landing ground to enable the Air Ambulance to land and pick up patients.

When Tripoli was reached Bartle left the Air Ambulance - with which he did 355 hours flying, to take command of the Desert Harassers. His record since then is the record of the squadron. Little more than that need be said. From Tripoli to Tunis and again in Malta and Sicily and southern Italy, "The Boss", as he was known to all members of the squadron showed qualities of leadership which were undoubtedly largely responsible for the grand job done by the unit.

Bartle volunteered when war broke out and was called up in the following August. He trained at Essendon and Wagga before coming to the Middle East in June, 1941. He is from Waroona, West Australia and is married with two children.