

STOKES, THOMAS VINCENT

279

[4870]

AWM 65

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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE.

OFFICERS & AIR-CREWS.

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

Surname STOKES No. 279
 Christian Names THOMAS VINCENT
 Air Force Rank & Mustering F/L General Duties Pilot.
 Degrees, decorations, etc. DFC. 10/3/44. (S.W.P.A.)
 Present appointment and location 10 Squadron. R.A.A.F. Mount Batten. Plymouth.
 Date of birth 21-1-16 Place Melbourne
 Educated Seelby Grammar from 1928 to 1933.
 Date of entering service October. 1937. 21 Squadron. Antigua in Force.
 Previous service experience 6th Batt. Royal Melbourne Regiment.
Rank. Private 1934 - Capt. & Sergeant 1934. Received commission 1935.
 Places of training Leiston - Portsmouth - Rattray - N.R. House Blackpool
England. Sept. 1940.
 Civilian career and activities A member of the firm of Stokes & Sons Pty. Ltd. selling, rearranging &
silversmith, badges, medals, buttons, metal stamping, etc. At time of
 Clubs, recreations, etc. clubman of an I am manager of the silversmith
section.
naval & military club. Melbourne.
 Father V.E. Stokes (late). He was managing director of Stokes & Sons Pty. Ltd.
since 1932.
 Wife
 Children
 Home address Melbourne.

Signature T.V. Stokes F/L
 Date 8/1/42.

Date embarked 17/7/40
 Destination U.K. 11 PDRC with
 Returned to Australia 1/7/42.
U.K. 24/8/44.

October 9, 1944.

SOUTH SEA ADVENTURES LEAD TO PALACE

Two dramatic rescue stories of the South Pacific war against the Japanese are associated with two Australian flying men who are listed to appear at the next Investiture at Buckingham Palace.

They are Wing Commander Richard Ashley Atkinson (an Australian member of the R.A.F.) who is to receive the D.S.O. and the D.F.C.; and Group Captain John Lerew R.A.A.F., of Melbourne, who is to receive the D.F.C. W/Cdr. Atkinson's father lives in Sydney.

W/C. Atkinson was rescued by a submarine when he was shot down 300 miles north-east of Singapore in December, 1941; G/C. Lerew spent nine agonising days in the New Guinea jungle after he was shot down during a determined air attack on enemy ships.

The citation to the award of the D.F.C. tells how W/C. Atkinson's flying boat was attacked by enemy aircraft 300 miles north-east of Singapore and, after a 15-minute combat, was hit in a petrol tank, caught fire, and had to be put down on the sea. The crew, of which two were wounded, were all suffering from burns. They were unable to launch the dinghy, and had to remain in the sea 6½ hours before being rescued by a Dutch submarine. "Throughout," the citation says, "Atkinson (he was a F/Lt. then) set a splendid example by his great steadiness and courage".

The citation does not tell how, after the combat, a friend of Atkinson's led the air search, found the crew in the water, supported by their Mae Wests, and dropped a message telling them to expect a submarine about 2 a.m. Or how, having no means of telling the time, the crew made a careful estimation and fired their only remaining Very cartridge into the darkness. The submarine was then three miles distant, searching for them, and by a lucky chance saw the signal.

W/C. Atkinson was born on May 21, 1913, commissioned in 1933, promoted flying officer in February, 1935, and flight lieutenant in September, 1940. He was sent to the Far East for flying duties in October, 1939, and was attached to the R.A.A.F. in Australia in March, 1942. He won the D.F.C. later in the same month, and the D.S.O. in April, 1943.

The D.S.O. was awarded "in recognition of conspicuous service in operations against the Japanese".

NINE DAYS IN JUNGLE

Group Captain Lerew's ordeal began on February 12, 1942, when, leading a Hudson formation from Port Moresby in a daring and successful attack on Japanese ships, in the face of six enemy fighters and fierce ground fire, his aircraft was hit and he and his crew had to bale out. Lerew landed in the tree-tops two miles from the Japanese lines.

Weak and sick with hunger, sucking leaves to diminish his thirst, almost driven mad by the giant mosquitos of New Guinea, his only companions wild pigs, Lerew wandered for days until he at last struck the bed of a dry creek and reached the sea. There he came upon a native village. The natives were too frightened to help him, beyond giving him water and bananas and paw-paws, and he pushed on to another native village, where he got quinine. At last he met several white men, who took him off in a schooner towards another Australian base. They were picked up on the way by a pinnace.

G/C, Lerew was one of the first Australians to receive the D.F.C. in the South West Pacific when he was awarded it in April, 1942, two months after his jungle ordeal. The citation stated "His industry, determination and courage throughout the period his squadron was at Rabaul was an example and encouragement to all his officers and men".

As officer commanding the R.A.A.F. at Rabaul from December 5, 1941, to January 20, 1942 G/C. Lerew organised dispersal areas and prepared slit trenches which prevented loss of life and saved aircraft during the subsequent Japanese attacks. He organised part of the R.A.A.F. evacuation of Rabaul, and led his squadron out.

G/C. Lerew enlisted as an air cadet on December 19, 1932, was commissioned in April, 1933, and became a wing commander in October, 1941.

(Note: The full story of G/C. Lerew's adventure is told in the R.A.A.F. official publication "These Eagles," a copy of which is available at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, Kodak House, Kingsway, W.C.2).

Other Australian flying men who are also listed to appear at the Investiture are:-

Wing Commander Thomas Vincent Stokes, R.A.A.F. pilot, of Melbourne (to receive the D.F.C.). Born on January 21, 1916, at Melbourne, he was educated at Geelong Grammar School, served in 6th Battalion, Royal Melbourne Regiment, and given an Army commission in 1935. He joined the Citizen Air Force in October, 1937.

Investiture -3-
which he was a member of the firm of Stokes and Sons Pty. Ltd., of Melbourne.
He was called up when war broke out, came to Britain in September, 1940, and
was posted to No. 10 Squadron R.A.A.F., in December, 1940. In July, 1942, W/C.
Stokes returned for a time to Australia, and on March 10, 1944 was awarded the
D.F.C. for conspicuous service and gallantry against the Japanese as flight
commander in an Australian Catalina squadron (sister squadron to that of W/C.
Atkinson).

Wing Commander William Lloyd Brill, R.A.A.F. D.S.O., D.F.C. pilot,
of Grong Grong, New South Wales (to receive the D.S.O.). Born on May 17, 1916,
at Gammain, New South Wales, he was educated at Yanco Agricultural High School,
and became a wheat farmer.
He served two years in the militia (21st Light Horse Regiment) before joining the
R.A.A.F. on November 11, 1940.
He trained in Australia and Canada, and reached Britain in August, 1941. He was
posted to an Australian Wellington squadron in December, 1941, and was awarded the
D.F.C. on June 26, 1942, when he was a pilot officer.

The D.F.C. citation states, "One night in May, 1942, this
officer was captain of an aircraft detailed to attack the Gnome Rhone
works at Gemevilliers. Bad weather was encountered throughout the
journey, and fine determination was shown in flying through heavy
rain squalls. Pilot Officer Brill's aircraft was caught in searchlights,
and anti-aircraft fire damaged the hydraulic system and put the rear
turret out of action. After making a circuit at 1,500 feet, Pilot
Officer Brill carried out an attack at 2,000 feet, and hit the target.
The hydraulic pipes, operating the bomb doors, were subsequently damaged,
and the bomb doors could not be closed. The return journey was made
in bad weather. Pilot Officer Brill, thinking that he would probably
have to make a crash landing, decided to descend away from his base
and he succeeded in making a good landing without flaps and with one
wheel damaged. This officer showed splendid courage and determination
and has proved to be a resourceful pilot at all times."

He was later posted to the most newly formed Australian Lancaster
squadron -- it began operations in November, 1943 -- in which he was a flight
commander. He was awarded the Immediate D.S.O. in May, 1944, a week after his
appointment to the command of another Australian Lancaster squadron.

The citation to his award of the D.S.O., announced on May 19, 1944,
states:

"This officer has completed a very large number of sorties,
and throughout has displayed leadership, skill, and gallantry of the
highest order, whilst his determination to make every sortie a success
has been notable. On one occasion, whilst over Berlin, his aircraft
sustained damage when fires started in one of the wings and in the
fuselage. Although the rudder controls were affected and the compass
was unserviceable, Squadron Leader Brill flew the damaged aircraft
back to base. On another occasion, more recently, his aircraft was
hit by shrapnel whilst over the target. One engine was put out of
action, some navigational equipment was rendered useless, and other
damage was sustained. In spite of this and in the face of adverse
weather, Squadron Leader Brill flew the aircraft safely home. His
record is worthy of the highest praise."

(Photograph in group available from R.A.A.F. O.H.Q. London, and R.A.A.F. H.Q.
Melbourne, Ref. No. U.K. 384).

Flight Lieutenant T.V. Stokes arrived in England in September, 1940, and after a short course at Blackpool was posted to No. 10 Squadron, R.A.A.F. to which he has been attached since.

On 14/12/40

With the squadron he was engaged up till May, 1941 on Atlantic patrol, guarding England's life line in an increasing watch for enemy raiders. In May the patrol was switched to the Bay of Biscay, again sub spotting, but with the added duty of keeping watch over the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at Brest.

Like other pilots from No. 10 Squadron he has acted as transport pilot to famous men and he was at the side of Brigadier General Pownall, second in command to General Wavell when the news was given to him that hostilities had broken out in the Far East.

Except for two months when he was off flying after crashing into a cliff during an air raid, Flight Lieutenant Stokes has been continuously on operations. He speaks enthusiastically of the efficiency and high morale among R.A.A.F. personnel, both flying and ground staff of No. 10 Squadron.

Between the members of the boat crews he said there is a splendid spirit and a great sense of equality. He described how all rations are pooled so that any delicacy coming from the Officers' Mess is scrupulously shared amongst all. No. 10 Squadron have..... certain submarines to their credit but feel confident that they have destroyed many more. They have made at least 30 attacks but it is not until they have actually seen an explosion, that they can claim a certainty.

OR have naval verification,

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