

## Part A

When David Charles Palmer went down to enlist for War at the local enlistment office, he had no idea what was to come. Palmer was 21 when he walked into the Alberton Enlistment office in South Australia. He did not know the many places that he would travel to such as Canada, San Francisco and Germany.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1919, Palmer was born in Glanville, South Australia. His parents were William Arthur Palmer and Mary Elizabeth Higgs. He was one of nine, and was the 5<sup>th</sup> born, right in the middle. His household would have been busy. We do not know the occupation of the parents and it is unclear what the socio-economic status of the family was. On his enlistment form, he stated that he was Methodist, which was prominent in many areas of South Australia from the 1850s<sup>1</sup>. His family lived in 10 York Street for the majority of his life, which was their house in Salisbury. For what would now be viewed as high school, Palmer attended Port Adelaide Central, which was a technical school, from the age of 12 to 16. He was described as having a “brown complexion, blue eyes and brown hair” (NAA: B884, S14580)<sup>2</sup>. Prior to joining the air force, Palmer was a keen swimmer, golfer and tennis player; he writes this on his application to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)<sup>3</sup>. Before he enlisted, Palmer worked as a wood machinist at *General Motors Holden* for six years; previously to this, he was a shop assistant.<sup>4</sup>

Palmer’s entire life was spent in Salisbury and most of his extended family spent their lives in that area as well. His mother was born in Beltana, in South Australia, while his father was born in Salisbury. Both their mothers were born in South Australia, along with Palmer’s paternal grandfather, while his maternal grandfather was born in Wales. This man was called William Henry Higgs. He was born in Grosmont, a small village in Wales. There are no other records suggesting that Palmer had other family members within the army. His mother and father came

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<sup>1</sup> SA History Hub (2021). Methodist Church | SA History Hub. [online] sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au. Available at: <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/organisations/methodist-church> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>2</sup> RAAF (1939). PALMER DAVID CHARLES : Service Number - S14580 : Date of birth - 13 Aug 1919 : Place of birth - GLANVILLE SA : Place of enlistment - ALBERTON SA : Next of Kin - PALMER WILLIAM. [online] National Archives of Australia. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6334302> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>3</sup> RAAF (1939). PALMER DAVID CHARLES : Service Number - S14580 : Date of birth - 13 Aug 1919 : Place of birth - GLANVILLE SA : Place of enlistment - ALBERTON SA : Next of Kin - PALMER WILLIAM. [online] National Archives of Australia. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6334302> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>4</sup> RAAF (1939). PALMER DAVID CHARLES : Service Number - S14580 : Date of birth - 13 Aug 1919 : Place of birth - GLANVILLE SA : Place of enlistment - ALBERTON SA : Next of Kin - PALMER WILLIAM. [online] National Archives of Australia. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6334302> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

from a big family, with his mother being one of eight children. William Palmer was also from a large family having nine other siblings, similar to the family that they shared with each other.<sup>5</sup>

When Palmer enlisted on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1940, it was for the militia, also known as the Citizen Military Forces. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1939, then Prime Minister Robert Menzies introduced "The Universal Service Scheme". This meant that "unmarried men turning 21 [had] to undertake three months' training with the CMF (Citizen Military Forces)" (National Museum of Australia, 2020)<sup>6</sup>, which was the first time Australia introduced conscription. A few years later Palmer then enlisted for the Royal Australian Air Force, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1942, in Adelaide.

Through his training for the air force, Palmer spent time all over the world, though, he began his journey only 58km north of Adelaide in Mallala. The RAAF base there was built in 1941 and was "home of No 6 Service Flying Training School during World War II" (RAAF Museum, 2021)<sup>7</sup>. Palmer remained there from the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 1942 to the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1943. He was later moved to No. 4 Initial Training School RAAF, at Mt Breckan, Victor Harbor, for another three months, *Figure 3*. Following that period of training he was sent to Perth for only two months. It can be assumed that he was sent there for further training, with a larger group of recruits. Then Palmer spent a short time in Melbourne before being shipped out to Canada. On his way there was a short stop in San Francisco. He spent around a year training there, as "the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was established in Canada to develop the air forces of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as of Canada." (American Historical Association, 2021)<sup>8</sup>. This meant that most of the RAAF personnel would have been sent to Canada for further training. Here they would have also interacted with English, Kiwi and Canadian troops.

All of Palmer's training was initiated under what was known as the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). This was an agreement formed by Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, to supply the required air personnel to

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<sup>5</sup> Ancestry (2021). *Palmer Family Tree*. [online] Ancestry.com.au. Available at: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/tree/172677712/family?cfpid=182243915099> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>6</sup> National Museum of Australia (2020). Second World War conscription | National Museum of Australia. *Nma.gov.au*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/second-world-war-conscription>.

<sup>7</sup> RAAF Museum (2021). *RAAF Museum: Royal Australian Air Force*. [online] Airforce.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/minisite/static/7522/RAAFmuseum/research/bases/mallala.htm> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2021].

<sup>8</sup> American Historical Association (2021). *What Was Canada's Role in World War II*. [online] American Historical Association. Available at: [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-47-canada-our-oldest-good-neighbor-\(1946\)/what-was-canadas-role-in-world-war-ii](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-47-canada-our-oldest-good-neighbor-(1946)/what-was-canadas-role-in-world-war-ii) [Accessed 14 Apr. 2021].

fight in World War II, as England realised it did not have enough airmen to win the war. Australia was able to train 28,000 airmen, Palmer being one of them. Schools were set up in all the dominions, which would have been the ones that Palmer attended. Then the advanced training took place in Canada, "because of its closeness to the British aircraft factories and the war zone" (Australian War Memorial, 2021)<sup>9</sup>, though in November 1940, some training took place in Rhodesia which is now known as Zimbabwe. In October of 1944, Australia's involvement in the scheme was ended, and the agreement "formally wound up on 31 March 1945" (Larkins, 2013)<sup>10</sup>. This scheme meant that a sufficient number of men could be supplied to the allies, and lead to the increase in strength of the allies during World War II.

After his training was complete in Canada, Palmer was sent to England for another four months of training, after which he joined the No. 52 Operational Training Unit for six months, *Figure 2*. Then he was moved into his official squadron, the 170<sup>th</sup> Squadron in Hesmwell, a town in England, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1945. This squadron was then shipped out to Germany to engage in combat.

When Palmer was shot down, he was in the crew of The Arvo Lancaster Bomber<sup>11</sup>. This plane would normally have a crew of seven, Palmer being the mid-gunner within it. He was responsible for identifying and shooting down enemy targets from all sides of the plane. These men were each "mutually dependent on the others and each had a vital part to play in ensuring that the aircraft reached its target" (Imperial War Museums, 2021). This meant that each of those seven men were entirely reliant on the other six men to allow them to wake up the next morning. They would have had to create a strong sense of mateship during this time, because if they did not, it could be life-threatening.

Within his service records it states, "7 March target Dessau nothing further heard." (Royal Australian Airforce, 1941-1945) Dessau was a town in Germany that was almost entirely destroyed by the raids during World War II. On the night of the raid six Lancaster bombers, one being the plane Palmer was in, were destroyed.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian War Memorial (2021). *Empire Air Training Scheme | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au). Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/raaf/eats> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Larkins, S. (2013). *Virtual War Memorial*. [online] [vwma.org.au](http://vwma.org.au). Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/research/resource-library/empire-air-training-scheme> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Smith, P. (2016). *William Desmond (Des) CALLAGHAN*. [online] [vwma.org.au](http://vwma.org.au). Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/622246> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

His father, William Palmer and mother, Mary Higgs<sup>12</sup> would have then been notified. The main method of communication at the time was by telegram, *Figure 6*, and families that lost someone would have received one, to alert them of the death. Due to the sheer mass, there was often a template that would be followed, and the name of the individual would be inserted. It would state how the death occurred, and when it happened, but other than that there was not a lot of information offered to families after their sons, brothers or husbands were killed.

Due to the fact that Palmer's plane was never truly identified, David Palmer has no gravestone. Though, he is remembered in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, in Kleve Germany, *Figure 5*, where his inscription reads, "His duty nobly done for loved ones in Australia" (Commonwealth War Graves, 2021). Palmer is buried alongside his crew members that were also killed in the battle, John Stennett Walker (Australia), Henry Charles Fuller (UK), Lenlie Thomas (UK), John Mahnoney (UK), Kenneth George Powell (UK) and William Desmond Callaghan (Australia)<sup>13</sup>, *Figure 4*. He is remembered in the Australian War Memorial, where his name is listed on the Honour Roll. There is also a memorial in South Australia and Salisbury where his sacrifice is remembered.

The perseverance Palmer demonstrated is evident in the amount of training he underwent. Palmer trained for three years, all over the world. Due to how far away he was from them, he would not have been able to see his family while he was training. David Palmer sacrificed so much just to be able to reach the battlefield. As he would have been travelling on ships and living on RAAF bases for three years, he would not have had the most welcoming home. However, he was willing to go through all of this to be able to fight for his country. After three years, Palmer went on his first mission and just over a month later he was killed. His sacrifice was the greatest anyone could make, but for him the training was worth being able to fight with the allies for Australia.

David Charles Palmer is the epitome of a South Australian soldier, his family having hailed from the region for at least three generations. He displayed great strength and his sacrifice for Australia meant that his fellow soldiers were able to defeat Germany and give us the freedom that we have today. Learning about Palmer's story means that those who may have been less known get to have their experiences shared and remembered. They gave their tomorrow for our today<sup>14</sup>.

**Word Count: 1500**

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<sup>12</sup> Ancestry (2021). *Palmer Family Tree*. [online] Ancestry.com.au. Available at: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/tree/172677712/family?cfpid=182243915099> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>13</sup> RAAF (1945). *Next of Kin of Lancaster Shot Down*. [online] Naa.gov.au. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=1065289&S=62&T=P&R=0> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>14</sup> Edmunds, J.M. (1916). *For Your Tomorrow*.

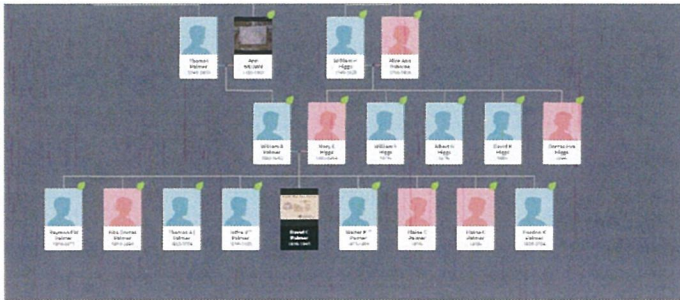


Figure 1 Palmer Family Tree<sup>15</sup>



Figure 2 Group portrait of sergeants (Sgt) of 52 Operational Training Unit (OTU) in front of an aircraft. (Palmer - Front row: 5th from the left)<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3 Victor Harbor RAAF Training Centre<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ancestry (2021). *Palmer Family Tree*. [online] Ancestry.com.au. Available at: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/tree/172677712/family?cfpid=182243915099> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>16</sup> AWM (1942). *Group portrait of sergeants (Sgt) of 52 Operational Training Unit (OTU) in front of an aircraft. ...* [online] [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au). Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C349825> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>17</sup> State Library of South Australia (1999). *No. 4 Initial Training School, RAAF Victor Harbor*. [online] State Library of South Australia. Available at: <https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+56699> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2021].

12001 Flying Officer John Stewart Walker. (Australian)  
 Legal Address, P.O. Clough, Esq.,  
 Friends, J.E. Reid, Esq.  
 Next of Kin: Mrs. S. Walker.  
 12002 Flight Sergeant Leslie Thomas.  
 Next of Kin: Mother, Mrs. E.A. Thomas.  
 12003 Flight Sergeant John Kennedy.  
 Next of Kin: Father, Mr. F. Kennedy.  
 12004 Flying Officer Kenneth George Powell.  
 Next of Kin: Father, Leading Aircraftman Powell, 220007.  
 12005 Flight Sergeant David Charles Palmer. (Australian)  
 Next of Kin: Father, Mr. F.A. Palmer, Friends, Miss de Bore.  
 12006 Flight Sergeant William Desmond Callaghan. (Australian)  
 Next of Kin: Father, Mr. E.A. Callaghan.

Figure 4 Next of Kin from Palmer's Crew<sup>18</sup>

Form 10  
 Name of Service Person: [Name]  
 Date of Birth: [Date]  
 Date of Death: [Date]  
 Date of Burial: [Date]  
 Name of Cemetery: [Name]  
 Reference: [Reference]

Figure 5 Casualty Information - Commonwealth War Graves<sup>19</sup>

**MESSAGE FORM**  
 Call IN [ ]  
 Prof. [ ]  
 TO: Mr. F.A. STALLARD, 29 VICTORIA STREET, MELB. (PRIVATE)  
 FROM: AIR BOARD, MELBOURNE  
 DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT IT HAS NOW BEEN PRESUMED FOR OFFICIAL PURPOSES THAT THE DEATH OF YOUR SON SERGEANT **CYRIL JOHN STALLARD** OCCURRED ON TWENTYNINE JULY 1942.  
 (1) THE MINISTER FOR AIR JOINS WITH AIR BOARD IN EXPRESSING PROFOUND SYMPATHY.  
 TO: POSTMASTER  
 REQUEST ADVISE AIR BOARD BY COLLECT TELEGRAM WHEN ACCOMPANYING WAR CASUALTY TELEGRAM ADDRESSED TO [ ] HAS BEEN DELIVERED FROM: AIR BOARD.

Figure 6 Example of what the telegram would have looked like to alert the Palmers of their son's death<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> RAAF (1945). *Next of Kin of Lancaster Shot Down*. [online] Naa.gov.au. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=1065289&S=62&T=P&R=0> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>19</sup> RAAF (2021). *Casualty Details | CWGC*. [online] Cwgc.org. Available at: <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2035409/WILLIAM%20DESMOND%20CALLAGHAN/#&gid=3&pid=1> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

<sup>20</sup> RAAF (1942). *STALLARD Cyril John - (Sergeant); Service Number - 403451; File type - Casualty - Repatriation; Aircraft - Lancaster I R5728; Place - Brains Le Compte, Belgium; Date - 29/30 July 1942*. [online] National Archives of Australia. Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=1060085> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

## Part B

My research about David Charles Palmer began in 2017. Preparation for my Year 6 Canberra trip included having to research a soldier. Mine was randomly given to me and it happened to be a man from South Australia, which was where I was moving to at the time from Brisbane. By researching Palmer it gave me something to relate to within South Australia. Then, when the "2021 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize" was about researching a lesser known South Australian soldier I had the opportunity to further understand the life of David Charles Palmer.

For me this started by looking at his family history, through *Ancestry*. By looking at where he was from, I could research where he grew up, who he grew up around and where his family was from. This helped me with describing his background prior to the war. Along with using *Ancestry*, I emailed the Salisbury and District Historical Society. They pointed me in the direction of a book called "Salisbury South Australia" by John Lewis. I proceeded to borrow this book, giving me a further understanding of where Palmer was from and what the conditions may have been like for his family.

By using the National Archives of Australia I was able to get access to Palmer's service records. These enlightened me on where Palmer travelled to and the details of his service. These were things like when he died, enlisted, what he looked like and where he trained. This formed the basis of the paragraph on his service. By using the information within his records I was able to research the training schools he attended. Doing this meant I could look at his service and what that might have been like. I also then looked into the "British Commonwealth Air Training Plan". By looking at this plan, I could provide historical context to Palmer's service and why he would have trained in certain locations.

Finally, I looked into how Palmer was killed. This led me to look into the Lancaster, which was the plane that he flew in. When looking into the crew of this plane, I learnt about the incredible sense of mateship that the men would have had, as they were in such close quarters and were responsible for one another. To help get a deeper understanding of what the parents went through, I found an image of what the telegram, that told them their son had been killed, would have looked like. For me, I was now able to empathise with the family, because I knew all of the context surrounding his death.

By researching the life of David Charles Palmer, I gathered a deep understanding of the war and some of the historical context surrounding it. Due to his short service time, I looked at some events in greater detail and also tried to go about the research in a way that told his story but could be brought back to many of the soldiers that lost their lives.

**Word Count: 499**

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