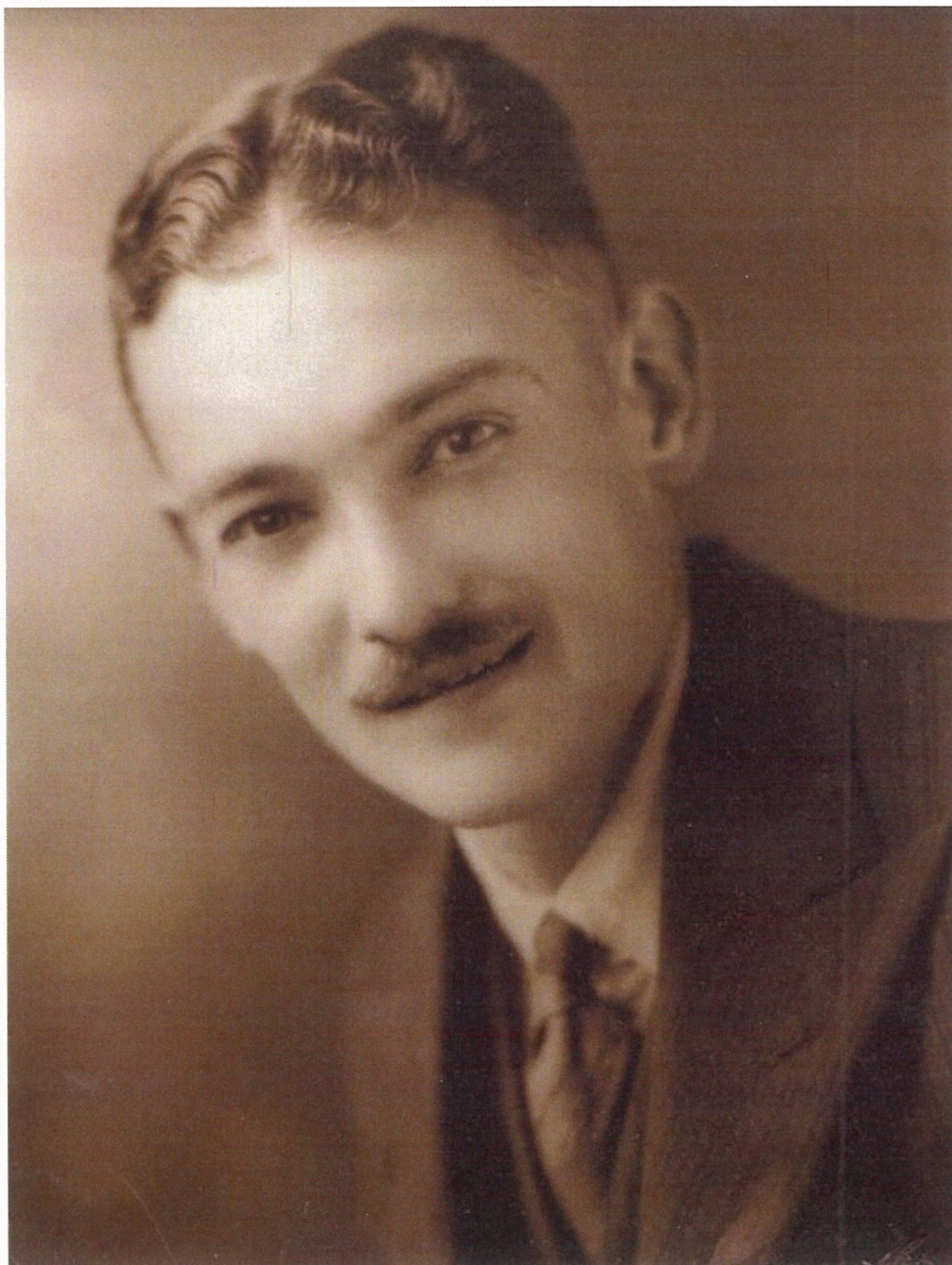


# ***Flying Officer Edward Tompson Mobsby***

*pOctober 12, 1910 – July 26, 1942*

**90<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (USAF)**

**Service Number: 407799**



**Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize 2021**

**Saint Ignatius College, Adelaide**

**By Aidan Chong**

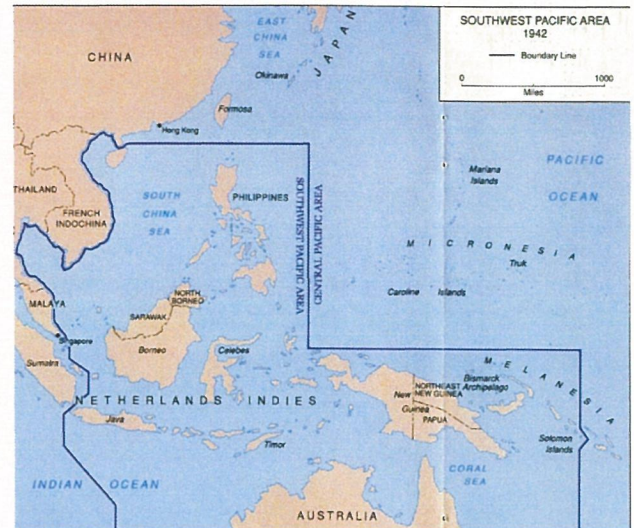


**Part A:**

**Edward Mobsby was a Flying Officer placed at an operating base in Papua New Guinea to fight in the Southwest Pacific Air War 1941-1945.**

**South West Pacific Air War 1941-1945**

The South-West Pacific Air War began on December 7, 1941, to August 15, 1945, due to the Japanese's aspiration to compete with the United States and the strong nations in Western Europe. The regions involved included the Philippines, Borneo, Australia, Papua New Guinea (including Bismark Archipelago), Singapore, the western part of the Solomon Islands, the Dutch East Indies (excluding Sumatra) and a few neighbouring territories (McCarthy, 1959). The South Pacific became an essential theatre in the war after the attack on Pearl Harbour by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service, which led to the loss of eight US Navy Ships. The Japanese wrong-footed the RAAF as most of their enlisted and training strength was scattered in Europe or at different points in the Empire Air Training Scheme to train aircrew for RAF operations in Northwest Europe (Larkins, 2014).



**Figure 1: Map of the South-West Pacific**

**Before the War**

Edward Mobsby was born in Hints, Staffordshire, in the West Midlands of England, on October 12, 1910. Edward Tompson was the only child of botanist Edward Maylott and housewife Nellie Maria. The Mobsby's migrated to Australia, Adelaide, in 1920 when he was just ten years of age, and they lived in Myrtle Bank, Unley (Hough, 2014). Mobsby attended Pulteney Grammar School in South Terrace; after finishing year 10, he took up a job at the Bank of New South Wales, now known as Westpac. There Mobsby met co-worker Erica Joyce Tassie who was three years younger than him; the pair fell in love and got married on October 10, 1936 (Roberts, 2016). Three years later, Edward and Erica welcomed twins Jennifer and Rae into their world. Figure 2 displays a family photo taken of them before Mobsby had enlisted into the RAAF.



**Figure 2: Flying Officer Edward Tompson Mobsby with his wife Erica and two twin daughters Jennifer and Rae.**



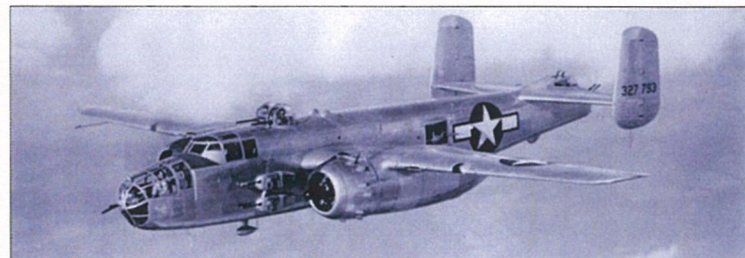
## ***During the War***

When World War Two broke out, Mobsby answered his country's cry, and at the age of 30 years and two months, he enlisted into the RAAF on January 9, 1941, as an aircraftman with the service number of 407799. This decision also came at the cost of being absent in his family's life, "He thought that within 12 months, the war would be over," Mrs Read said (Roberts, 2016). A quote from Jennifer Read one of Mobsby's twin daughters which shows how oblivious Mobsby was when he enlisted into the RAAF.

Mobsby attended many different airforce schools in various places, including Adelaide, Mount Gambier, Port Pirie and interstate from January 1941 to May 1942. Mobsby's airforce instructors recognised him as a "good airman pilot" and "a keen hard worker who carries out his duties with energy and zeal" (NAA, 2018). In May 1942, Edward Mobsby was placed at the RAAF Headquarters North-Eastern in Townsville, and due to his "outstanding record" (www.awm.gov.au, 2021). Mobsby was detailed for duty with an American squadron. During the early years of the South-West Pacific Air War, due to the shortage of qualified American aircrew members, many RAAF members joined the USAF to help fill up the numbers in American squadrons. In June 1942, E.T. Mobsby joined USAF's 90<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and was then posted in Charter Towers, Queensland (Smith, 2014).

### ***90<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (USAF)***

The 90<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron during World War Two mainly operated in the South Pacific theatre using B-25 Mitchell aircraft and A-20 Havoc. Mobsby flew in the twin-engine North American B-25 Mitchell aircraft on various occasions to participate in bombing raids.



**Figure 3:** A photograph of a B-25 Mitchell Aircraft

"The young men and women serving in the 90th Fighter Squadron today stand on the shoulders of the giants, Flying Officer Mobsby was one of those giants," General Herbert 'Hawk' Carlisle said in his speech (awm. collections, 2014). A quote from General Carlisle, a retired United States air force four-star general, in his speech commemorating Edward Mobsby as a war hero.

Pilot Officer Mobsby was stationed in Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, with his new squadron, the 90<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron. Mobsby participated in his first bombing raid with his squadron flying in the B-25 Mitchell in early June, attacking a Japanese base in Lae, Papua New Guinea. Furthermore, Mobsby participated in consecutive bombing raids as the month progressed on Japanese bases in Lae and Salamua (NAA, 2019). The planning for these raids is shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Displays Mobsby and his colleagues (unknown) mapping out future operations on a flying field in Papua New Guinea.

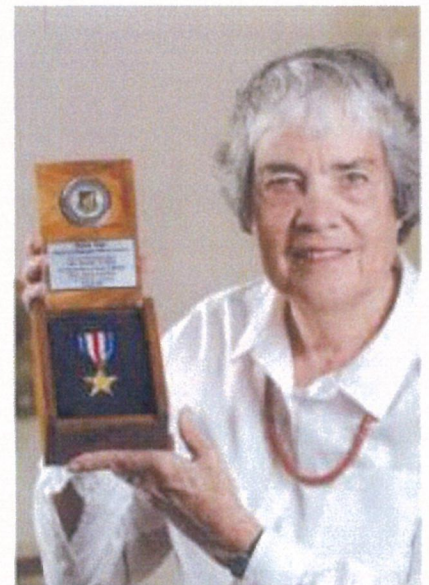
July 25, 1942, Mobsby and his crew members departed their operating base in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, with the primary objective of bombing Japanese convoys at bases in Gona and Buna. Mobsby, in his B-25 Mitchell, started their journey with no enemy aircraft visible. Mobsby and his crew were intercepted and attacked by up to twelve Japanese Zero Fighters, for up to 15 minutes, he was involved in a 'running fight' (Roberts, 2016). Mobsby's B-25 was hit by a 20mm cannon shell which exploded against the firewall breaking an oil line. The Mobsby luckily landed back at the operating base with no electrical system, low oil pressure and smoke emerging from the exploded engine.



After this, another mission was being planned. The destination being 500km Northeast, Gasmata, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, with the primary objective to strafe and sink Japanese ships. Mobsby had been told by his commanding officer earlier that *"This mission closely approached being an all-out suicide mission."* (Advertiser, 2014). Nevertheless, Mobsby and his crew stood firm, ready to face the consequences for the greater good of his country, thus displaying the ANZAC spirit characteristic of perseverance. On July 26, 1942, Mobsby, Lieutenant Ralph Schmidt and three other crew members took to the skies, all of them aware that any interruption would leave them struggling for gas when returning to Port Moresby. Flying in a formation of B-25's, the lead aircraft's engine struggled to start, which led to Schmidt and Mobsby taking charge. Up to 30 Japanese Zero Fighters ambushed all of a sudden, the squadron. His luck finally ran out. Mobsby's already damaged B-25 went up in flames, leaving the formation (Roberts, 2016). He was last seen desperately trying to bail out of the top hatch. Five of the crew also withered with him, and the mission was aborted. Mobsby is an example of a real-life hero whose story must be shared; his ability to show ANZAC spirit characteristics under challenging times should also be acknowledged.

### **After the War**

Initially, Mobsby was categorised as missing for nearly a year, and on June 8, 1943, his remains were found a short distance from Kokoda. He was buried in Port Moresby Bomana War Cemetery in Papua New Guinea. Erica Mobsby received a letter confirming her husband's heroic death on July 26, 1942, aged 31, and Mobsby also earned posthumous promotion from Pilot Officer to Flying Officer. Approximately six months later, Erica and her twins received Edward's personal belongings. After this traumatic experience, Mrs Mobsby founded the organisation War Widows Guild of Australia and worked as the president. Mrs Mobsby passed away in 1993, aged 79, never witnessing her husband's heroic acts being truly acknowledged. *"She was deeply, deeply hurt and she never remarried. She just loved him. Three short years later and he was gone. She would have been proud, I am sure."* Mrs Read said (Hough, 2014). A quote from Jennifer Read's (one of Edward and Erica's twin daughters) speech displaying Erica's undying love for Edward. In 2010, Jennifer Read and Rae Rayner (Mobsby's twin daughters) found their father's records. Through internet research and asking various war veterans, Mrs Read learned that a crash site had been found near Isoge, Papua New Guinea. The following year Mrs Read, both of her sons Peter and John, and Cousin Peter DeGaris travelled to Papua New Guinea to visit the crash site and gravestone of Edward Mobsby. After this Mrs Read sent many letters both to the US and AUS Government (Advertiser, 2014). March 12, 2014, the last post ceremony for Edward Mobsby was finally held; this also allowed Edward's family to be presented with his Silver Star, which was awarded for Mobsby's courage and gallantry during World War Two. The Silver Star is significant because it is the third-highest military honour. Figure 7 displays the Jennifer Read holding the Silver Star, Mobsby was awarded for his heroism. Mobsby's story is also featured in many newspapers, including The Advertiser and Air Force News.



**Figure 4:** A photo of Jennifer Read holding the Silver Star

## **ANZAC Spirit**

ANZAC spirit refers to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps showing characteristics of perseverance and mateship during the war. Edward Tompson Mobsby proved to show characteristics of both of the ANZAC spirit in many ways. When called into action, Mobsby never backed down, always obeying commands and doing anything to serve his country. Expanding on this, Mobsby showed the characteristic of perseverance on bombing raids; even when a 20mm cannon shell hit his plane, he could guide his B-25 back to his operating base. Adding on to this, the next day, he was ready to participate in another bombing raid with other crew members in his damaged B-25, even though this ended up being the end of him. Mobsby showed the characteristic of mateship and determination, never backing down from what was essentially a suicide mission. Thus, displaying what kind of man Mobsby was, one that would never back down even if the odds were against him, clearly showing the ANZAC spirit and characteristics of perseverance and mateship he possesses.

**Word Count:** 1496

### **Part B:**

When this task was offered to us, I immediately began calculating in my head what would be the best for my interests; inevitably, it ended up being the Premier's ANZAC School Prize. At first glance, I began researching a soldier using the Virtual War Memorial Website. The task specifically asked us to research a South Australian soldier, so I set the filter for South Australia and started looking. I came across a few potential options, but the one that caught my eye was *Flying Officer Edward Tompson Mobsby*, who ended up being whom I did my assignment on. Straight away, I began reading about his service during World War 2, which was very interesting to me. The teachers introduced us to many resources we could use on the Virtual War Memorial Website, including a biography template and research checklist. The next thing I did was download all these files and save them to my folder for this task. The website I looked through on the research checklist included the *DVA Nominal Roll*, *Australian War Memorial*, *The Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, *The National Archives of Australia*, *Trove Australia*, *AWM – Unit Diaries*, *AWM – Collections* and *The State Library of South Australia*. All these websites provided me with valuable sources which could be later used in my essay; however, the websites that gave me the most knowledge include *the Australian War Memorial*, *Virtual War Memorial* and *The National Archives of Australia*, which allowed me to check service records. After this, I constructed a portfolio of the sources I found through the research checklist and thoroughly analysed each source. I ended up with fifteen sources which immensely helped me when writing my essay.

It was now time to begin my essay. I opened the task sheet and took in the sections that needed to be completed, which included Part A, which included the context of the war, before the war, during the war, after the war and how *Mobsby* showed the ANZAC spirit characteristics of perseverance and mateship. I looked through the portfolio of sources I created before and made myself a plan of what I was going to write about. The plan would include researching the context of the war *Mobsby* served in, the *South-West Pacific Air War*, researching what *Mobsby* did before the war, during the war and after the war. After this, I would analyse what I wrote and write about the ANZAC spirit characteristics of perseverance and mateship *Mobsby* showed during the war. When the plan was complete, I used examples of previous prize winners to structure and write Part A. The essay I wrote on *Edward Tompson Mobsby* allowed me to have a better understanding of his life, World War 2 in general and overall improved my historical skills.

**Word Count:** 460

**By Aidan Chong**



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