

Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize 2021

Jack Richard Hopgood

By Bethany Yates

Jack Richard Hopgood (Figure 1) was born on the 22nd of January, 1920 in Mt Gambier, in the colony of South Australia. Jack is the oldest son of a first generation family, his father being Charles Richard Hopgood and his mother, a third generation woman, Adelaide Beatrice Crafter. He grew up in a large family home with his younger sister, Joan (P.Hopgood, 2021). Jack left Mount Gambier High School in 1935, working for his father's mechanical business until 1940. He then enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on the 1st of April, 1940 (Pasin, 2021). As the RAAF examined his application, they assigned him straight to ground crew - his parents had not given him permission to fly, as he was only nineteen years old. He trained as an aircraft electrician in Melbourne, passing with 100% score, showing his dedication to his country. On his final leave from the RAAF, Jack married Jean Crafter on October 28th, 1940 (J. Hopgood, n.d.).



Figure 1- Jack Hopgood dressed in Royal Australian Air Force Uniform, 1940 (State Library of South Australia, 2021)

Corporal Hopgood was first posted to No. 25 Squadron, Pearce, WA. Whilst working there, Jack and his friend, Jack Cranna volunteered for active duty. The following day they were informed that they would be posted to Singapore immediately. Jack arrived and joined No. 8 Squadron in Singapore on the 23rd December, 1940 via a civilian coastal vessel in order to avoid suspicion.



Figure 2 - Kota Bharu, Malaya April 1941. Group picture of No. 8 Squadron RAAF (Jack Richard Hopgood- A Journey from 22/ 01/20, 2021)

Throughout the next six months No. 8 Squadron was deployed to an airfield, Kota Bharu (Figure 2) near the Thailand border (No. 8 Squadron, 2021). Upon returning to Singapore, they noticed that No. 453 Squadron was armed with Brewster Buffalos. Although this aircraft was an improvement on the outdated CA-3 Wirraway, they were no match for the Japanese Zeros (Lee and Davies, 2021). On the 8th of December, 1941, Japan invaded Malaya. From here, working hours and discipline increased. No. 8 Squadron was soon moved to Kauntan, a small airstrip on the East Coast (No. 8 Squadron, 2021). Jack had just become an LAC when he had his first wartime experience. His war had finally begun.

While serving at Kuantan, Jack soon realised that the lack of communication between each service made work difficult. On one occasion, he was a couple of hundred yards away from the airfield, aligned with low flying attacking aircraft shooting at him, but he showed his grit and determination to survive.. Not long after, all three squadrons were ordered to return to Semawang base to continue operations. On the way back to Singapore, No. 8 Squadron took a detour by boat to Batavia in Java (see figure 3, key 4), which was targeted the entire way (J. Hopgood, n.d.).

The airport in Batavia had already suffered a substantial amount of bombing and the surviving aircraft were deemed useless. No. 8 Squadron was ordered home. Despite this, CO Davis elected to stay and fight and required technical staff,

including electricians. Jack decided to remain, reflecting his incredible perseverance. However, not long after No. 8 Squadron departed they were forced to evacuate to a small village on the South Coast (Picthall, 2021). Here, they spent ten days waiting for a submarine escape, which would never arrive. Their CO had informed them he was going to surrender. Naturally, Jack and his mates, Ray and Max were not impressed and decided to leave. The three men traveled along the South Coast of Java where they had planned on using a local fishing boat as an

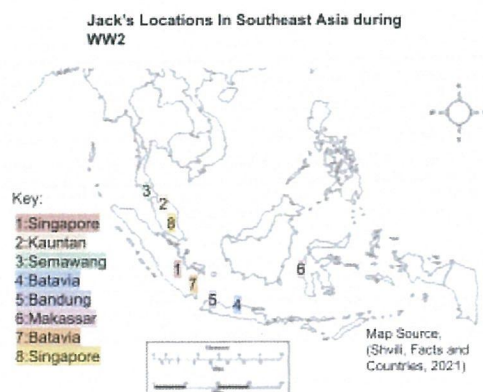


Figure 3- Map Of Southeast Asia

escape. As there were none to be found, they traveled village to village armed with nothing more than a small sum of money and personal possessions. Unfortunately, from here their situation worsened when Jack became infected with dysentery whilst Ray and Max contracted malaria. Although times were tough, their mateship was stronger, supporting each other through. At one point they noticed a small group of natives following them. As they were crossing a road, a truck approached them blaring its horn the entire way. It was loaded with Japanese soldiers who jumped down, aiming their rifles and bayonets at them. They had no choice but to surrender, soon discovering that the locals had sold them out for three guilders, (three shillings) (J. Hopgood, n.d.).

For the next three days they were locked up under guard. Jack was now suffering with dysentery and malaria, selling his watch to buy medicine. They were then relocated to Bandung and then to Makassar, a large concentration camp where they met nine Australian doctors, including Sir 'Weary' Dunlop.

However, this particular camp was less strict compared to others that Jack was soon to face. Arriving at Batavia Cycle Camp they experienced the intensified security right after the beheading of six Australians. Jack's

time here was unpredictable and dangerous due to the unfair treatment by the Japanese guards. As a trained electrician, he worked on camp maintenance and installing security features. Workloads were challenging and food minimal, but Jack persevered, encouraging his mates to be strong (J. Hopgood, n.d.).

While in the workshop, he met a couple of Australian radar mechanics who convinced him to help them build a wireless radio, mainly using parts from a P4 Tomahawk. To everyone's horror, the Japanese secret police began rummaging through everything. Jack barely had enough time to cover the powerpack and throw it in a large crate before a guard picked it up. The guard shook the radio and shoved a stick into it, before discarding it. A close call.



Figure 4- Jack Hopgood at ANZAC Day 2021

Jack was now relocated to Singapore. Due to its close vicinity to the Naval Base, they were prone to frequent dangerous attacks. It was common for incendiary canisters to be dropped by aircraft and explode in the camp. One raid on the docks caused half a mile radius of the camp to be blown to pieces. On the 11th May, 1945 they began to hear rumors of Germany's surrender. This gave the prisoners a rise in spirit, but even more ration cuts. Jack was sent to Old Marsh Road concentration camp on the 3rd of August, 1945. Circumstances were looking dire for Jack, his weight recorded around 38kg, at it's best. Despite that, Jack persisted, working day and night to complete the pointless tasks assigned. Everything changed on the 18th of August, 1945 when he was thirty feet underground working with a jackhammer. Suddenly there was silence. Someone pulled Jack out of the tunnel yelling with excitement, '*It's all over!*' (J. Hopgood, n.d.).

Jack and his mates broke out of camp after obtaining a small truck and raided local warehouses for supplies. Three long weeks after the surrender, the British fleet arrived in Singapore. Unsure of the commotion, Jack and some mates went down to the docks to have a look. At first the British did not recognise them as their own due to their emaciated and unkempt appearance. However, it was not long before they realised that they were POW. The British supplied clothing, water, food, cigarettes along with a substantial amount of questions. Some of Jack's squadron had been flown in from Thailand in poor health and were promptly sent back to Australia. Jack had been offered a seat on the airplane, but declined, having decided it would be better to come home by sea on the Duntroon. He had figured he would rather be singing songs, having a beer, eating good food and sharing stories with his mates to celebrate the end of the war (J. Hopgood, n.d.).



Figure 5- Jean Hopgood (left) and Jack Hopgood (right) 1940 (Mealey, 2021)

Jack arrived in Darwin around October, 1945, a truly resilient and grateful man (RecordSearch | National Archives of Australia, 2021). Within twenty four hours of his arrival, Jack received an excited call from his wife, Jean. He eventually saw her

three days later in Adelaide, after an initial hesitation of how he would fit back into society. He moved back to Mt Gambier to be with his parents, where he lived with Jean. Together they were blessed with four children, Peter, Andrew, Duncan and Cathryn. While in Mount Gambier, Jack and his close friend, Charlie Miller (RAAF Spitfire Pilot) spent many days together. Although complete opposites, they were best buddies. Sadly, Charlie Miller passed away on the 23rd of September, 2020 (P.Hopgood, 2021).

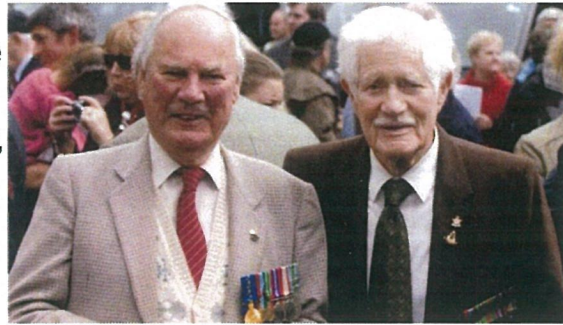


Figure 6- Charlie Miller (right) and Jack Hopgood (left) on ANZAC Day

Jack worked in a partnership with his father at 'Hopgood's Garage' for many years, growing and adapting his business. Retiring in 1982, Jack and his wife were a big part of the Mt Gambier community and RSL. Unfortunately, Jean passed away in 2008. Jack still lives in Mt Gambier to this day at the admirable age of 101, surrounded by his loving family and friends. A brave man with a heart of gold (J. Hopgood, n.d.).

When Jack visited Japan in 2017 he commented, '*I don't hold any resentment. Hate is a useless emotion*' (Mealey, 2021). Throughout his life, Jack has truly displayed the attributes that embody the Anzac spirit.

Word Count: 1473

Part B

In order to research Jack Hopgood's story I searched through multiple sources to be able to complete my entry. Any reliable research project has a combination of primary and secondary sources. It was important to me that I try to obtain a personal account from Jack, gaining first hand knowledge from a WW2 veteran. However, due to Jack's recent stay in Hospital and recuperation, I was unable to interview him in person. However, I was fortunate to march behind Jack as he led the 2021 Mt Gambier ANZAC Day parade.

On the 3rd of April 2021, I was finally able to arrange an interview with Jack's eldest son, Peter Hopgood. During the interview Peter explained what it is like to have Jack as a father and friend. Jack, like many other prisoners of war, is not very open about his time in service. Over the years, he has not revealed very much to his family about what he went through, so they can only imagine. The detailed information that Peter shared with me was a vital and authentic resource. This interview was a primary account from a direct family member and became an integral part of my research.

The Mount Gambier Returned Service League President, Bob Sandow provided me with a personal written account that Jack Hopgood wrote about his life. The document contains memories of his childhood, war time experience, family, retirement and many photographs. Jack's son, Peter Hopgood, informed me that it was written as a family legacy. While reading through Jack's personal account and his airmen's service record located on the NAA, I discovered a discrepancy of dates. Due to Jack's mature age of 101, naturally there are differences in some dates, compared to the service records. As it is Jack's story, I wrote it according to his dates and added in a few missing dates.

I also used a number of reliable websites to find supporting evidence of Jack's story. Websites such as the RSL National, ABC News and the National Archives of Australia all enabled me to gather information from a wide variety of verified sites. The main website I used was The Australian Virtual War Memorial that held all of Jack's service records. This provided me with both valid and valuable details allowing me to cross reference the information from Jack's Story.

Finally, I visited the Mount Gambier Library to gain an understanding of Japan's part in the War. I researched the aircraft used in Malaysia and Singapore and their use. As well as this, I looked through the maps of Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore to pinpoint where Jack had been transported during his imprisonment.

A combination of solid primary sources and comprehensive and reliable secondary sources has enabled me to produce a fitting tribute to Jack Hoppood's life, war service, and his Anzac spirit.

Word Count: 471

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