WAR HERO
THAT TIME FORGOTTEN

The persistence of an Adelaide woman has finally paid off, with her father being awarded one of the US’s highest military honours - 72 years after his aircraft was shot down by Japanese fighter planes over Papua New Guinea. ANDREW HOUGH reports on this extraordinary tale.

EDWARD Mobbsy knew the risk. That the odds were stacked against him and his crew. That the air space over the jungles of northern New Guinea were buzzing with Japanese Zero fighters. That the chances of surviving their mission in the lumbering Mitchell B-25C bomber were, at best, slim.

But he had no hesitation. “If we died, they weren’t showing it.”

Just hours earlier, Mobbsy, a lookout from Adelaide, on secondment to the US Army Air Forces 49th Bombardment Squadron, had managed to guide his plane back to base with smoke billowing from an exploding engine, following a 15-minute “running fight” with the enemy.

This time, however, his luck would run out. On the morning of July 26, 1942, he and American pilot First Lieutenant Ralph Schmitz - with three other crew - took off from Seven Mile Strip at Port Moresby.

Along with four other Mitchells, their destination was Guadalcanal, in New Britain, 500km to the northeast, to strafe and sink and Japanese flying boats.

It was a test of time for the allies against fighter on the Kokoda Track and the Battle of Milne Bay weeks away from erupting.

But even if they were successful, Mobbsy and his American mates knew the return trip would drain every last drop of fuel from their aircraft and it would be a struggle to arrive home. They never got the chance to find out. Just 35 minutes into the flight - and bearing on their left - the squadron suddenly came under fire from up to 30 Zero fighters.

Mobbsy’s bomber, which had been rendered “defenceless”, was shot down in flames as it left formation - and the pilot was last seen trying to bail out of the top hatch from the burning fuselage. The crew was killed.

The mission was scored as a second. Mitchell was also lost. It would be a year before Mobbsy’s remains were found a short distance from Kokoda.

For 72 years, Mobbsy’s heroism went unrecognized. An “administrative oversight” meant that, as an Australian, he could not receive one of America’s highest decorations for valor despite his crew all earning the heroism that all changed 10 days ago.

Under sunny skies during a special ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Mobbsy, who died aged 91, joined an exclusive club in receiving one of the nation’s highest military honours.

His twin daughters, Jenny and Rae, aged just three when their father was killed, were present with the posthumous Silver Star medal for bravery by General Herbert ‘Hawk’ Carlisle, the commander of the US Pacific Air Forces. It was an emotional conclusion to a long fight by his daughter, now Jenny Terai, aged 74, that occurred by chance and won against all odds.

Today, his astonishing story can be revealed in full for the first time – from his decision to enlist with the RAAF to being lauded an “everyday hero”.

The Silver Star, the US military’s third-highest award for gallantry, might never have been bestowed without intervention from the highest levels of the Australian government, including the White House and US embassy in Canberra.

In a moving speech, the Four-star general told parliamentarians and senior Defence personnel how he was “extremely humbled and honoured” to have flown from Hawaii to present the medal.

Asking why it “mattered”, he told the crowd: “All of those who serve their country are heroes… it’s in a man’s way to know that they can rest assured that their battles’ act of gallantry in battle will be honoured.

“I that even 72 years from now, the selfless sacrifice they are making will be recognized.”

Speaking at her Beaumont home during the week, Mrs Reid said the journey “just didn’t sit well with me”.

“I was always a person in favour of justice and could not see how my dad’s sacrifice was less valuable, less important, less heroic, less honourable or less gallant because he was an Australian,” she said.

“So I went on a crusade. He has always been my hero. He didn’t have a funeral, a memorial service or an opportunity for people to show they respected him. “Everyone who read his story will now know what a hero he was.”

EDWARD Tempest Mobbsy was born on October 12, 1910, in Hancocks Creek, a small village in the British Midlands, the only child of Edward Mobbsy and Edith; the family emigrated to Adelaide when he was 10 and lived at Myrtle Bank. He attended Parafield Grammar School and joined the Bank of New South Wales – now
Jap Fighter Strength Up
From R. J. ANDERSON, at the
Advanced Allied Base
Japanese fighter protection of
their ground forces in the
Gona-Buna area, which was
added to enemy conquests last
week, is now formidable.
At least 15Zero attacked an
Allied bomber formation which
painted the area on Sunday. Out
of 15 bombers only two
managed to return.

How the attack on Edward Mobsby’s
bomber formation was reported

Excerpts of speech by General Herbert “Hawk” Carlisle (right)
honouring Flying Officer Edward Thompson Mobsby

"Some may say ‘Why bother? This was 70 years ago. Everyone involved
is no longer with us. What does it matter?"

To that, I answer: it matters. It matters to Jenny and Rae, his daughters,
to see their father properly honoured. It matters to his grandchildren and
great-grandchildren to know that they are the sons of a hero.

And it matters to the men and women serving today. Think about that P-40
pilot up in Alaska, flying in the 90th Fighter Squadron, the same unit F/G
Mobsby served with.

All of those who serve their country and put themselves in harm’s
way need to know that they can rest assured that their bravery and
gallantry in battle will be honored.

That even 70 years from now, the selfless sacrifices they are making will
be remembered. That their service matters, and will be rightly honored.

Westpac – after finishing
Year 10, he later met
colleague Erica Tasnie,
known as Joyce, three years
his junior – and the pair fell
in love, marrying on October
10, 1938.

Three years later they wel-
come twin girls and settled
into suburban life at Glenvale.
But soon after, World War
II broke out and, caught up
by a sense of duty and the
romance of adventure, he
answered his nation’s call on
January 6, 1941, enlisting in
the RAAF.

Taking inspiration from
his father, who served in the
Bose War at the turn of the
20th century, it was a
decision that was also
something of a wrench –
having to leave his family.

“He thought that within
12 months, the war would be
over,” Mrs Read said. During
training in Adelaide, Port
Pirie, Mt Gambier and inter-
state, his air force superiors
quickly identified him as a
‘good airman pilot’ and a
‘hard worker who carries out
his duties with energy and
zeal’, according to National
Archives records.

Nearly 14 months later, his
‘outstanding record’ led to a
secondment to the US Air
Force, which was battling a
qualified crew shortage.

Mobsby was stationed in
PNG but was killed less than
three months later after
being involved
in several combat missions.
His squadron, which was
known as the 90th Aero
Squadron when it was creat-
ed in 1941, had a proud his-
tory and fought on the
Western Front in France dur-
ing World War I. Known
today as the 90th Fighter
Squadron, its pilots by F/G
Rapport from Emsenker
Base, in Alaska.

“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
Carlisle said in his speech.

His family’s fight for jus-
tice began in September 1942,
when his wife received an
official telegram stating he was
missing in action. A later let-
ter from his squadron leader
filled her with pride when he
told her Mobsby had been
recommended for the Silver
Star.

By 1943, Mrs Mobsby
now back at the bank
working as a single
mother – began to make “pol-
ites inquiries” about her hus-
band’s personal effects, in
particular a large blue
case wedding gift, as well as
the medal.

Nothing could be released
until confirmation of his fate,
she was told. So she waited
for 10 months before being
informed his remains had
been found and that he had
earned a posthumous promo-
tion to Flying Officer.
Six months later, his per-
sonal items, including
clothes, letters, two diaries,
correspondence and photos,
were returned in the case.

“Through it all, Mrs Mobs-
by remained brave, private,
stoic and very proud,” Gen-
eral Carlisle said.

There are no records at
the National Archives of any
communication between the
two countries about the Silver
Star recommendation and offi-
cials now suggest “con-
fusion” from both forces led
to the mix-up. The issue was
rarely spoken about and Mrs
Mobsby was left to grieve.

In an event not uncom-
mon with those left at home,
she had woken the morning
she died from what she later
told Mrs Read was a “night-
mare or vision”, weeping,
after “hearing my dad calling
her as his plane was shot
down”.

Mrs Mobsby would be-
come instrumental in found-
ning the War Widows Guild
of Australia and served as presi-
dent in an organisation that
now has 25,000 members.
She died in 1993 aged 79,
having never witnessed her
husband rewarded for his ul-
timate sacrifice – an honour
she had sought “diligently
and faithfully”, officials say.

Continued next page
US honours Aussie's bravery 70 years after his death

Andrew Hough

AN Adelaide grandmother has told of winning her long fight to have her "hero" father honoured with one of the United States' highest military honours, seven decades after he was shot down at war.

Flying Officer Edward "Moby" Melbye, 31, died when his Mitchell B-25 bomber was attacked by Japanese Zero fighters during a fierce air fight over the jungles of Papua New Guinea during World War II in 1942.

But an "administrative oversight" meant that, as an Australian, the former bank clerk from Adelaide, could not receive one of the US's highest decorations for valor.

The US military posthumously awarded four of the American crew with the Silver Star bravery award, after they flew despite warnings their assignment was akin to "an all-out suicide mission".

Finally, after a 72-year fight by his family, the first-son, Mrs Read, applied for her father's remains to be given a full military ceremony.

The ceremony was held at Port Moresby's Royal War Cemetery. On her return home, she felt compelled to carry on her father's crusade to have the Silver Star awarded to her father, known as "Moby", by sending letters to both Australian and American governments.

The majority were ignored.

But in 2010, Mrs Read, her twin sister Rae Rayner, of Geelong, decided to track down their father's war records.

"I knew my father was a great soldier and that he killed him on his mustard sandwich", said Mrs Read, who has eight grandchildren.

"I know from an aunt that he was just a great guy, with a wonderful sense of humour.

"Up until I was quite old, I didn't think I ever really had a father. I just knew that he was dead, that he was buried in New Guinea somewhere."

Looking to the internet with just the family name and the plane's ID number, Mrs Read found a website for a forum, posted by William "Wally" McConnaughy, in the US state of Maryland.

Mr McConnaughy, a Department of Defence contractor, revealed that his uncle Corporal Billy Newport Cook, 23, was the upper-turret gunner on the ill-fated plane and his remains have never been found.

The 61-year-old, a career�urnament after four years of service in the USAF, provided extensive information about the squadron.

"That included details from his diary, as well as a diary, in which he wrote about how his Australian "mate was respected greatly admired and loved for his sense of humour, energy and willingness to serve."

A few months later, Mrs Rayner learned from US officials that the wreckage had been found near the village of Lospo, in the Central Highlands.

The following year, she fled the village in Lospo, where her father died, from a letter to Barack Obama out of Australia, asking if the US President could "make some inquiries."

Three years later, apologetic responses came from two senior Defence Department officials, who informed Mrs Read that they were processing her application. The ceremony two weeks ago remains a blur for Mrs Read, who said she was overwhelmed by the interest.

"I feel that I now know him and have reconnected with him. It has been wonderful for my family. We are so very thrilled and proud."

"This award is the highest decoration for valor that can be awarded in our armed forces and we are thankful to finally be able to honour Flying Officer Mohr's gallantry in action against the enemy," a spokesman said.

His remains were interred at Port Moresby's Royal War Cemetery.