



WAR HERO

THAT TIME FORGOT

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 Mobsby knew the risks. That the odds were stacked against him and his crew. That the airspace 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.

They'd been told as much by their commanding officer, who wrote in the combat log: "This mission closely approached being an all-out suicide mission."

Yet, they had no hesitation – or, if they did, they weren't showing it.

Just hours earlier, Mobsby – a bank clerk from Adelaide on secondment to the US Army Air Force's 90th 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 Schmidt – with three other crew – took off from Seven Mile Strip at Port Moresby.

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

It was a tense time for the allies amid fighting on the Kokoda Track and the Battle of Milne Bay weeks away from erupting.

But even if they were successful, Mobsby 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 down on their target – the squadron suddenly came under fire from up to 30 Zero fighters.

Mobsby's bomber, which had been rendered "defenceless", was shot down in flames as it left formation – and he was last seen trying to bail out of the top hatch from the burning fuselage. The five crew perished. The mission was aborted as a second Mitchell was also lost. It would be a year before Mobsby's remains were found a short distance from Kokoda.

For 72 years, Mobsby's heroism went unrecognised.

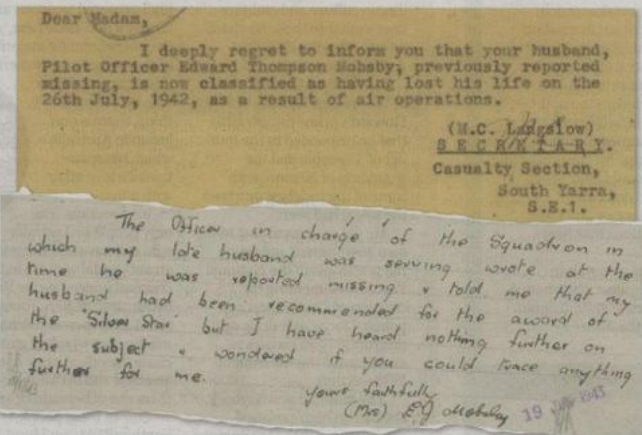
An "administrative oversight" meant that, as an Australian, he could not receive one of America's highest decorations for valour despite his crew all earning the honour. That all changed 10 days ago.

Under sunny skies during a special ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Mobsby, who died aged 31, joined an exclusive club in receiving one of the allies' highest military honours.

His twin daughters, Jenny and Rae – aged just three when their father was killed – were presented 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



FLY BOYS: Edward Mobsby and two RAAF colleagues in an undated photo found in his belongings after he was shot down and killed.



TREASURED ITEMS: Correspondence kept by Flying Officer Mobsby's wife, Joyce.

fight by his daughter, now Jenny Read and 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 eventuated without intervention from the highest levels of the American government, including the White House and US embassy in Canberra.

In a moving speech, the four-star general told politicians, diplomats 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 and put themselves in harm's way need to know that they can rest assured that their bravery and gallantry in battle will be honoured."

"That even 72 years from now, the selfless sacrifices they are making will be remembered."

Speaking at her Beaumont home during the week, Mrs Read said the injustice "just did not sit with me".

"I was always a person in favour of justice and I 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 reads his story will now know what a hero he was."

EDWARD Tompson Mobsby was born on October 12, 1910, in Hints, Staffordshire, a small village in the British Midlands, the only child of Edward senior, a botanist, and Nellie, a housewife.

The family emigrated to Adelaide when he was 10 and lived at Myrtle Bank. He attended Pulteney Grammar School and joined the Bank of New South Wales – now

I WAS ALWAYS A PERSON IN FAVOUR OF JUSTICE ... SO I WENT ON A CRUSADE. HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY HERO.

Jap Fighter Strength Up

From B. J. ANDERSON, at an 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 15 Zeros attacked an Allied bomber formation which raided the area on Sunday. Our bombers were heavily outnumbered.

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

Extracts of speech by General Herbert "Hawk" Carlisle (right) honouring Flying Officer Edward Thompson Mobsby

Some may say 'Why bother? This was 72 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 scions of a hero.

And it matters to the men and women serving today. Think about that F-22 pilot up in Alaska, flying in the 90th Fighter Squadron, the same unit F/O 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 honoured.

That even 72 years from now, the selfless sacrifices they are making will be remembered. That their service matters, and will be rightly honored.



FOR KING AND COUNTRY: Edward Mobsby with twins Jenny and Rae in 1941 (left); Edward (without hat) and his American crew in July, 1942 - just days before the doomed mission (top); and Jenny with sons Peter and John at her father's gravesite, in Papua New Guinea (above).

Westpac - after finishing Year 10. He later met colleague Erica Tassie, known as Joyce, three years his junior - and the pair fell in love, marrying on October 10, 1936.

Three years later they welcomed twin girls and settled into suburban life at Glenside.

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 Boer 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 interstate, 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 created in 1917, has a proud history and fought on the Western Front in France during World War I. Known today as the 90th Fighter Squadron, its pilots fly F-22 Raptors from Elmendorf 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 justice began in September 1942, when his wife received an official telegram stating he was missing in action. A later letter 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 "polite inquiries" about her husband's personal effects, in particular a large blue travelling

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 promotion to Flying Officer.

Six months later, his personal items, including clothes, toiletries, two diaries, correspondence and photos, were returned in the case.

"Through it all, Mrs Mobsby remained brave, private, stoic and very proud," General Carlisle said.

There are no records at the National Archives of any communication between the two countries about the Silver Star recommendation and officials now suggest "confusion" 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 uncommon with those left at home, she had awoken the morning she died from what she later told Mrs Read was a "nightmare or vision", weeping, after "hearing my dad calling to her as his plane was shot down".

Mrs Mobsby would become instrumental in founding the War Widows Guild of Australia and served as president in an organisation that now has 25,000 members.

She died in 1993 aged 79, having never witnessed her husband rewarded for his ultimate sacrifice - an honour she had sought "diligently and faithfully", officials say.

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US honours Aussie's bravery 70 years after his death



PROUD: Jenny Read with her grandfather's Silver Star

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 "Mobs" Mobsby, 31, died when his Mitchell B-25C bomber was attacked by Japanese Zero fighters during a fierce firefight 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 valour.

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 father-of-two, on secondment to the US Army Air Force's 90th Bombardment Squadron, was lauded for his heroism during an emotional ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in

Canberra 10 days ago. It came after a battle by one daughter, Jenny Read, and intervention from the highest levels of the American government, including the White House and US Embassy in Canberra.

Mrs Read, 74, and her twin sister Rae Rayner received their father's award from General Herbert "Hawk" Carlisle, the Hawaii-based Commander of the US Pacific Air Forces.

For Mrs Read, of Beaumont, in Adelaide's east, it was culmination of a three-year fight that was started by her late mother Joyce in the 1940s

after he perished. Mrs Read, a mother-of-three, said she wanted to fight the obvious "injustice".

"I got my irk up and I decided I was going to do something about this," she said.

"It has been wonderful for my family. We are so very thrilled and proud."

The US Air Force paid tribute to Mrs Read, a grandmother-of-eight.

"This award is one of the highest decorations for valour that can be awarded in our armed forces and we are thankful to finally be able to honour Flying Officer Mobs-

by's gallantry in action against the enemy," a spokeswoman said.

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



72 years later, Aussie war hero receives top honour

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"That was my biggest sadness, that my mother did not know about this," said Mrs Read, a mother of three.

"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."

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

"All I knew was that my father wore a brown suit and that he liked ham on his mustard sandwiches," said Mrs Read, who has eight grandchildren.

"I knew 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 doomed in New Guinea somewhere."

Taking to the internet with just the family name and the



CRASH SITE: The wreckage of Flight Officer Mobsby's Mitchell B-25 bomber.

plane's ID number, Mrs Read's youngest son, Peter, 44, discovered a web forum, posted by William "Wally" McCollum, in the US state of Maryland.

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

The 67-year-old, a career bureaucrat after four years' service in the USAF, provided extensive information about the squadron.

That included details from his uncle's war 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 Read learned from US officials that the wreckage had been found near the village of Isoge, in the Central Highlands.

The following year – and 69 years to the day her father died – Mrs Read travelled with Peter, her other son, John, 47, and a cousin, Peter DeGaris, to visit the crash site and his gravesite at Port Moresby's Bomana

THE SILVER STAR

- It was first issued during World War I following an Act of US Congress on July 9, 1918.
- It is the third-highest US military honour behind the Medal of Honour and Distinguished Service Cross.
- 35 Australians have received the honour – 30 during World War I and five during the Korean War.
- The medal is a small silver star, three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter that indicates "a citation for gallantry in action".

War Cemetery. On her return home, she felt compelled to carry on her mother's crusade to have the Silver Star awarded to her father, known as "Mobs", sending letters to both Australian and American governments.

The majority were ignored. Former US Ambassador to Australia Jeffrey Bleich replied and would become instrumental in helping her battle American bureaucracy.

"I greatly appreciate your effort to see that your father's bravery and service are recognised in the same manner as that of his crew," he wrote in April last year.

But her application was delayed for months and, in January, she sent a letter to Barack Obama out of frustration, asking if the US President could "make some inquiries".

Three weeks 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," she said.

A US Pacific Air Forces spokeswoman paid tribute to Mrs Read's determination.

"We are extremely thankful for the stalwart efforts of Jenny Read, who revived the quest for her father's award," she said.

"By formally presenting F/O Mobsby's family his Silver Star, we have an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the gallantry and courage that he exhibited alongside his American crew members so many years ago."

"This award is one of the highest decorations for valour that can be awarded in our armed forces and we are thankful to finally be able to honour (his) gallantry in action against the enemy."