

Ronald Andrew Wardlaw 76310 LAC

Ron Wardlaw is my father and was a member of the 31 Squadron from 25th September 1943 until his discharge on the 18th January 1946. Dad kept a diary from the 22nd June 1942 to the 1st June 1944. I have used information from his diary and his service records to create the following profile of his service with the RAAF during WW2.



Dad was born on the 1st May 1923 in Gympie Qld. He enlisted on the 22nd June 1942, aged 19, at No. 3 Recruiting Centre in Brisbane where he lived with his parents John and Alice Wardlaw and younger sisters Peggy and Jean. He left Brisbane that night and reported to No.3 Recruit Depot in Maryborough the following day. On the 10th July 1942 he was posted to No. 3 School of Technical Training at Ultimo in NSW. He arrived in Sydney on the 12th July to commence training as part of Trainee Group 5.



On the 16th January 1943 he was remustered as an instrument repairer and was sent to No.5 Aircraft Depot at Forest Hill NSW on the 21st January 1943. A month later he was posted to No.1 Embarkation Depot at Ascot Vale in Victoria then to No.4 Embarkation Depot at Mitcham in South Australia on the 12th March. On the 19th March 1943 he was posted to No.55 Operational Base at Birdum in the Northern Territory then 3 days later was posted to the No.1 Fighter Wing in Darwin with "A" Flight of the 54 Squadron, a British Spitfire Squadron. He arrived in Darwin on the 22nd March 1943. In April 1943 he was reclassified as a Leading Aircraftman, remustered as an instrument maker and posted to No.55 Operational Base at Birdum in the Northern Territory. On the 9th August 1943 Dad was posted to the No.52 Operational Base Unit at Berrimah. He witnessed several bombings while in Darwin and the following excerpts are taken from his diary.

Sunday 2nd May 1943: "Well I have actually seen the Japs Bombers. They flew in pattern formation overhead & dropped about 50 bombs. 6 of our kites are written off, 2 shot down, 4 forced down on beach. Well it has been rather an exciting day."

Sunday 20th June 1943: "Well, did I say NO excitement! We sure got it today. The dirty little yellow...came down strafing us. I was never scared before, but when a man sees about 9 of "Nippon's" kites coming at tree-top height, well, I calls that getting scared, especially with bullets whistling about. Well it was good fun while it lasted - like hell. I had a feeling as though I wanted to hold on to somebody. It was a strange feeling. The "Spities" & "Zeros" were having a dog-fight about us. It was really a great show on our part."

Monday 21st June 1943: "Well everybody was keyed up about the big do yesterday, and believe me, there are quite a lot of the lads just as bad as me. It is exactly 12 months since I went into camp, by the day, but 12 months by the date tomorrow."

Tuesday 22nd June 1943: "Things still a bit shaky on it. Expecting another do. Sure enough, about 9.50am the "Red" comes on and we 26 down into the bush. We were there for nearly an hour, but as we heard later, it was just as well they didn't get this far, or else we would have been no more. Anyway, the scare was more than enough for most of us. I have been rather worried the last couple of days that I haven't paid much attention to my correspondence."

Monday 28th June: "Well, another raid today, but the bombers were very high."

Wednesday 30th June: Another raid. Fair bit of damage. Strafed again. Lost 5 "Spities" for 8 Japs. Not so good. W. came back with holes everywhere."

Tuesday 6th July 1943: "Another raid. We missed it fortunately. Lost 2 kites. Mr Norwood forced down for fuel shortage. Arrived back at 3.30."

Friday 13th August: "Well, it's the 13th & it's Friday. Went to the pictures but didn't see them through because the "Nips" payed us a visit. Saw "Brother Orchid" & just started on "Sun Valley Serenade". Could have said a lot of things. Came home without the lights because there was a "Yellow" on. Arrived home (camp) about 10.00pm. "All Clear" given about 10mins later, then a "Yellow" again in about half an hour. Then the horns blew. Well to tell the truth, I was scared. It was such a beautiful night for a raid. Well about 20mins after the "Red", we could see the Ack Ack flashes, then heard the bombs dropping. But they dropped wide of their objectives. That was the first night raid. The "Spits" went up but the Ack Ack too thick to do any good. One Bomber shot down. Didn't get much sleep."

Tuesday 17th August 1943: "Rather an exciting day. 457 shot 3 Reccos in the morning, then about 4.00pm they shot another one over. "Killer" made short work of him. Rather a good day's work. We also had a "Red" warning about 11.00pm. Nothing eventuated from it."

Tuesday 7th August 1943: "Rather an exciting day. 1 Recco, escorted by about 20 "Zeros", came over. 5 shot down, 9 probables. Lost 1 kite & Pilot. Mr Hinds & "W"."

Tuesday 14th August 1943: "Was one of the Firing Party for Mr Hinds' funeral."

Posted to 31 SQUADRON at Coomalie Creek The following is from Dad's diary.

Friday 24th September 1943: "Well rather a surprise posting to 31 Squadron. "Beaus". Had afternoon off getting clearances. Orchestral show. Rather "Goodo!"

Saturday 25th September 1943: "Left for 31 Squadron about 9.00am. Arrived about 3.00pm. Scorching hot day. Nearly roasted. Got fixed up then it rained."

Monday 27th September 1943: "First day on the strip. Rather good. Better than "Spits" to work on."

Tuesday 28th September 1943: "Working in Instrument Section. Real good too."

On the 4th October 1943 Dad was transferred to "B" Flight then 10 days later the Squadron was moved to Darwin. The following excerpts are taken from his diary.

Saturday 9th October 1943: "Well the boys are away on the Bash, "Selaru". Six went out, 4 came back. The other 2 crash landed in Darwin. "Butch" Gordon (S/L) brought his "Crate" back on 1 motor, then had to crash land. Had one of the ground staff with him. He shot down 2 twin-engine fighters."

Monday 18th October 1943: "The "Beaus" were putting on a turn when one hit the trees. A terrible crash. 3 killed."

Tuesday 19th October 1943: "Six "Beaus" went on a "Bash". Found new Jap strip. Lost one "Beaue". The Pilot & Observer were lovely chaps, Mr Cridland & Mr D. Perries."

Monday 1st November 1943: "Bash" on. Led by "Butch". Had his under-carriage shot up. Landed safely. All aircraft returned."

Thursday 11th November 1943: "Bash" on. Led by "Butch" & Ray White. All returned safely. "Butch" blew a Bofors gun up. Also was hit by one of its shells. When he returned the D.F.C. was waiting for him. We also had a raid that night or in the early hours of Friday morning. 9 planes came over, 2 shot down. One of "Spits" was lost for a while. He turned up later. They dropped their bombs about 200yds from where we were. Even heard the bombs dropping. Eventually got back into bed at 5.00am after 3 hours of waiting."

Sunday 21st November 1943: "Kites took off on "Bash" going to Taberfane. Lost one B 25. One shot up, came home on one motor. One "Beaue" missing another hit by Bofors shell on port main plane just behind dingy. Sgt. McMillan (Obs) hit by shrapnel. Knocked his identity disk off his wrist. Another piece behind his neck in his "Mae West", broke off his pencil & a bullet lodged in his harness."

Monday 22nd November 1943: "Beaues" searched for "145" without success. Another "Bash" on tomorrow."

Monday 6th December 1943: "Duty Crew organised a "flip" with F/O Archer. Two of us went up, "86" & "152". We were in "152". "86" didn't come back. Went in just off the coast. Saw a patch of smoke, went to investigate & found Keith Henry in the dingy. F/O Archer stripped off his "Mae West" & dingy. I took them to Jack Holland (Obs). We opened the hatch & dropped 2 "Mae Wests" & a dingy to him. We circled again, then made for home. We climbed to 3000ft slowly at about 220 knots, levelled out at 260 knots. Came in over Adelaide River. Could see our strip from there. Came home feeling rotten. Didn't tell Mum."

Note of Interest: Before the boys boarded their assigned planes, the orders were switched, which meant the crews changed planes. This meant that Keith Henry changed places with Dad so he was killed instead of Dad. The pilot of Keith's plane was P/O Ken Gerdes and the navigator was F/Sgt Andrew McMillan. The accident report I found in the service records of F/Sgt McMillan states that the two planes left Coomalie Creek at 4.30pm to carry out a test flight and shooting exercises in Anson Bay. During the exercises "86" reported it was having trouble and was heading for the coast south of Peron Island. At approx. 5.10pm the crew of my Dad's plane, "152", saw that Keith's plane had crashed into the sea 8 miles south west of Peron Island. Keith was seen clinging to a partially inflated dinghy. No other survivors were found. Dad's crew dropped 2 Mae Wests and a dinghy to Keith then returned to base. The "152" returned to the scene to direct help from shore. At 6.40pm Keith was retrieved from the dinghy. He was conscious but seriously injured suffering from compound fractures of both knees and massive internal injuries. He told his rescuer that he hadn't seen the other 2 crew members after the crash. Keith was conveyed to Batchelor Airstrip and then to Coomalie Creek where he was admitted to the No.1 MRS at 8.10pm. Sadly, he died from his injuries at 10.40pm. His funeral was held the following day at 3pm attended by 30 members from the 31 Squadron. He was buried at the Adelaide River War Cemetery. Keith, Dad and F/Sgt McMillan were all aged 20, P/O Gerdes was 22. The bodies of Gerdes and McMillan were never recovered. Dad's plane, A19-152, survived the war and was struck off on the 8th August 1949.

Wednesday 15th December 1943: "Big "Bash" on. Eight Kites going to Dilli (Timor). All returned safely & the Japs certainly suffered today."

Thursday 16th December 1943: "Another "Bash" today. They took off at 5.30am. Went to the same place. "Butch" & "Fergy" got a twin-engine fighter each. Bashed up some more ships. Real good day. "21" got shot up a bit."

Wednesday 5th January 1944: "Butch' shot down another kite which gives him a total of 6 making him an Ace Pilot. Boy! What a man."

Friday 11th February 1944: Nothing much doing so far. "Butch" & F/O Archer took 2 Kites south, "51" & "21". They arrived back today with a new one. "Basher" Barnett brought one up also. Also "Blackjack" Walker put on a turn with a "Mozzie". Boy! what a turn. Dived on the strip with one motor (port) & went up in a climbing roll. We stood with our mouths open & how."

Sunday 27th February 1944: "Butch" brought about a dozen Nurses to see our Section. Had quite a nice chat to "Butch". Half an hour afterwards he was putting on a turn & testing "165" when both motors cut. So, another great man meets death. He had just received his bar to his D.F.C. He lived for about 4 hours. Died about 9.00pm."

Thursday 30th March 1944: "Lost a new Pilot & Observer on first Bash". F/L Fitton flying "182". Brand new Kite & crew. Another bash today."

June 1944: "Well, nothing very interesting has happened, only PRU have a "Mozzie" now. Gosh! 1st June, 1 "Mozzie", 1st Opp. They are a lovely looking kite. W/C Mann has been posted south & "Wenty" is CO now."

This was the last entry in Dad's diary.

On the 23rd June 1944 Dad was posted to the No.3 Personnel Depot at Sandgate. From there he had several more postings before being discharged on the 18th January 1946:

8 SFTS in Bundaberg QLD
5 SFTS in Uranquinty NSW
13 ARD in Breddan QLD
5 OTU in Wagga Wagga NSW
3PD at Sandgate QLD.

On the 27th May 1950 Dad married Mum, Elaine Morsley, at Shorncliffe Methodist Church where Mum's father was the minister. They lived in Maryborough initially where they raised 4 children then moved to Sandgate in 1959 where their 5th child was born in 1963. Dad and Mum were active members of the Shorncliffe Methodist Church, where 4 of their 5 children were married. Dad took an early retirement after a brush with cancer and they retired to Caloundra in June 1981. Over the ensuing 19 years they welcomed 13 grandchildren into the family, received the Premier's Award for outstanding community service to Queensland in 1993 and celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on 27th May 2000. Dad passed away peacefully at home with his family around him on the 12th October 2000. Dad attended several reunions of the 31 Squadron and was an active volunteer for the Queensland Air Museum in Caloundra for many years. He was instrumental in organising and dedicating the memorial plaque to the Beaufighter and Boston Squadrons that stands at the front of the Queensland Air Museum. The following article is from the QAM website.

"We note with sadness the passing of member Ron Wardlaw on 12th October 2000 after an extended battle with cancer. Ron spent his youth in centres as far apart as Moree and Gympie. His first employment was as a grocer's delivery boy and later he joined Rocla Pipes. He enlisted in 1942 as an instrument fitter in the RAAF and served in the N.T. with 31 Sqdn on Kittyhawks, Bostons and Beaufighters. After the war he joined NCR as a cash register technician. He and Elaine married in 1950 and raised a family of five. Apart from work, Ron served in the Maryborough and Shorncliffe areas as a church officer and scout leader. Following an episode of cancer 20 years ago he was active in fundraising for the Cancer Fund and other charities. Since retirement to Caloundra he has acted as a wildlife ranger, and helped with Elaine's music activities, as well as playing the spoons himself. He joined the museum shortly after we moved to Caloundra and was active in opening the door on extra days and in providing hospitality. A member of the Boston-Beaufighter Association, he was instrumental in dedicating the plaque at the front of the building. His funeral overflowed the chapel on Monday 16 October 2000."



1st May 1923 – 12th October 2000

Respectfully Submitted
Sue Smith
Daughter of Ron Wardlaw
16th March 2020



Ron Wardlaw enlisted in the RAAF at age 19.





PHOTOS ABOVE & RIGHT
"Home" for Ron at Coomalie Creek 1943.



PHOTO LEFT
(L-R) Ron Wardlaw,
Wally Ford,
Dave Annandale,
Blue Laycock
at Coomalie Creek 1943.

PHOTO RIGHT
(L-R) Dave Annandale,
Wally Ford,
Ron Wardlaw
at Coomalie Creek 1943.





PHOTO ABOVE

Instruments Section at Coomalie Creek 1943.

PHOTO BELOW

Ron Wardlaw working on instruments at Coomalie Creek 22nd June 1943
exactly 12 months to the day from when he enlisted.



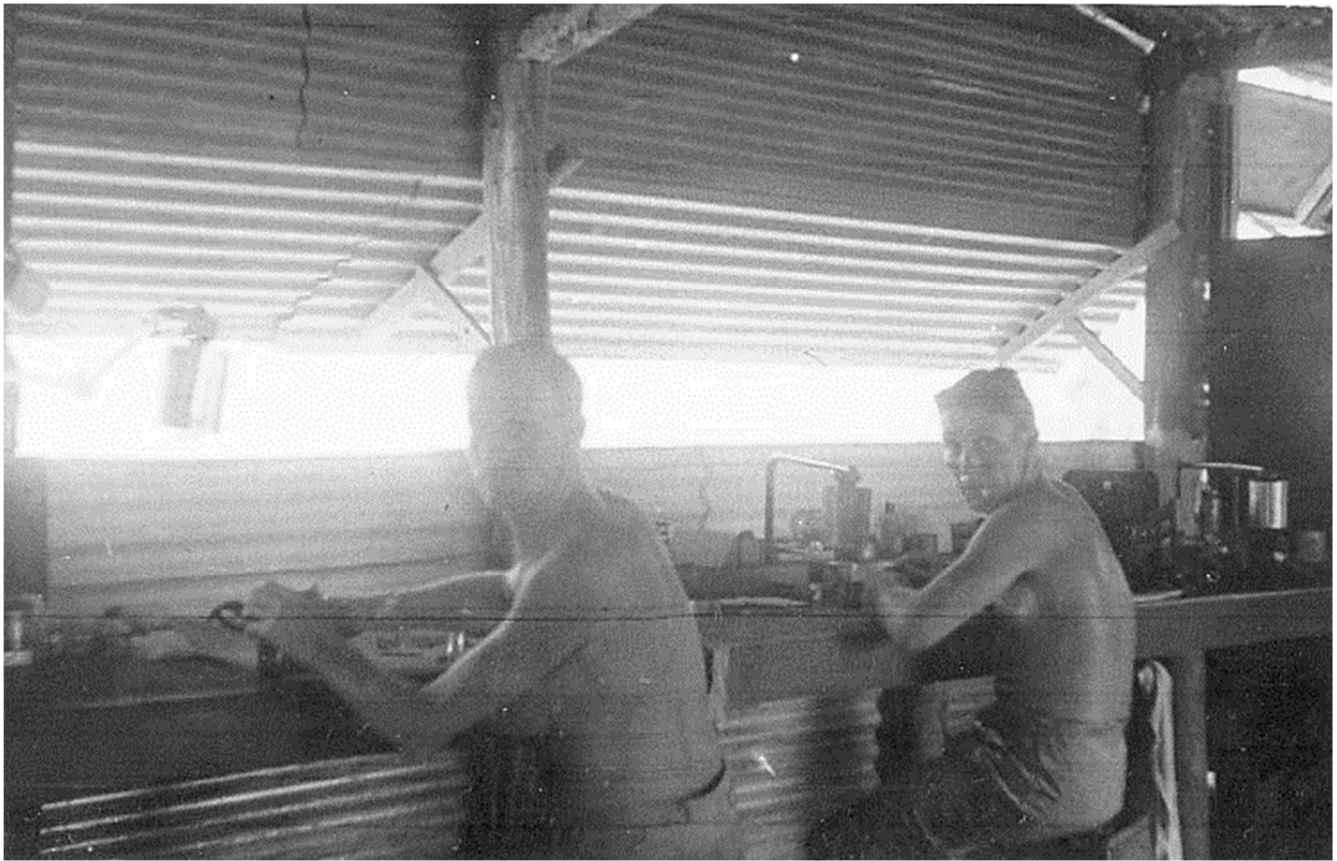


PHOTO ABOVE

(L-R) Blue Laycock?? & Ron Wardlaw working on instruments at Coomalie Creek.

PHOTO BELOW

(L-R) Sgt Jack Slennett, Blue Laycock, Blue Cummings, Unknown, Gordon Hepworth, Ron Wardlaw outside the Instruments Section at Coomalie Creek 1943.



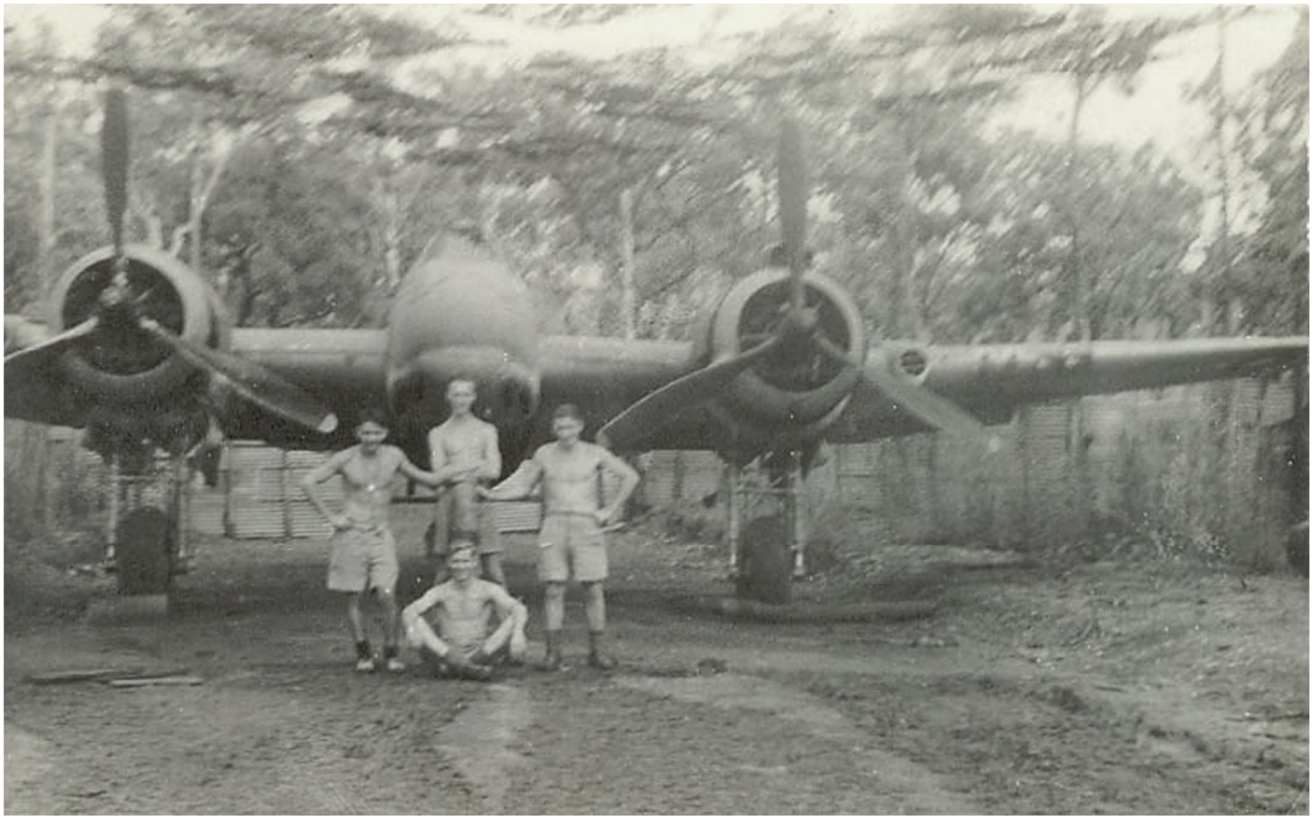


PHOTO ABOVE

Beaufighter in bay near Instruments Section at Coomalie Creek 1943
(L-R) Wally Ford, Blue Cummings, Ron Wardlaw & Unknown sitting.

PHOTO BELOW

Beaufighter in bay near Instruments Section at Coomalie Creek 1943
(L-R) Unknown, Blue Laycock, Ron Wardlaw & Blue Cummings.





PHOTO LEFT

Christmas Day 1943
at Coomalie Creek

“Butch” Gordon is front and centre of the photo. He received his DFC on 11th November 1943 and in early 1944 became an Ace Pilot. On 27th February 1944, Butch was killed when his plane crashed after both engines failed. Ron talked with Butch just 30mins before he took off on what was his to be his final flight.



PHOTO LEFT

Christmas Day 1943
at Coomalie Creek

Inscription on back of photo:
S/L “Butch” Gordon D.F.C. & Bar
Had 6 Japs to his credit,
was an “Ace” Pilot.
Killed while testing an aircraft
on 27.2.1944. Was a great guy.



PHOTO LEFT

Christmas Day 1943
at Coomalie Creek

Inscription on back of photo:
Our C.O. W/C Mann, he’s a
great scout, is only young so is
one of the boys.



PHOTO ABOVE

Inscription on the back of photo: C.O. holding wheelbarrow, Peter Shaw in wheelbarrow plus rubbish on top of him, F/O Garnham nearest camera - all having fun on Christmas Day 1943.

PHOTO BELOW

Christmas Day 1943

Inscription on the back of photo: Few of the lads and myself (on left) giving a Sergeant a bath, clothes and all. I put the hose down the leg of his shorts. Boy! What a day!





PHOTOS ABOVE, RIGHT & BELOW

Ron Wardlaw.... Inscription: Taken during the wet season on the road to work at Coomalie Creek 29th April 1944.



PHOTO BELOW

Ron Wardlaw on the shoulders of Unknown showing the size of a local ant hill.

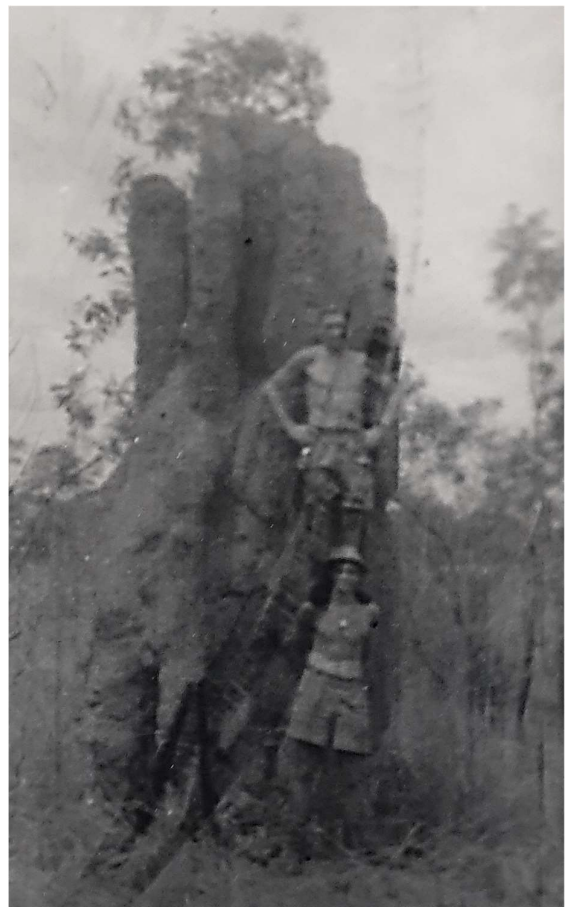




PHOTO LEFT
Ron Wardlaw in the cockpit of a Beaufighter
at Coomalie Creek 1943.



PHOTO RIGHT
Ron Wardlaw (R) sitting on the nose of
a Spitfire plane
Inscription: Servicing "Spits" at RAAF
Drome Darwin August 1944.



PHOTO ABOVE TAKEN MID TO LATE 1990's

Ron Wardlaw (R) with Peter White, Secretary Beaufighter & Boston Association QLD, holding the plaque that now stands at the front of the Queensland Air Museum building at Caloundra QLD.



PHOTOS LEFT & ABOVE

Ron Wardlaw with the plaque that now stands as a Memorial at the front of the Queensland Air Museum building at Caloundra QLD.

ARTICLE BELOW

This article was written by Peter White and appeared in the "The Whisperer" in January 2000

The

WHISPERER

**The Newsletter of the Beaufighter and
Boston Association of Queensland**



JANUARY 2000



Model of 30 Squadron Beaufighter A19-137 which was presented to The Association by the Aspley Model Association. This particular Beaufighter was flown on a number of missions by member S/Ldr Arthur Thomson with Hon Sec as Nav.



Hon Sec. , Members Ron Wardlaw and Stan Curran handing over the model of 30 Squadron Beaufighter A19-137, (together with enlarged prints of the recovery of Boston "Big Nig" from a swamp in PNG) to War Planes Museum at Caboolture. Stan also made one of his very special Squadron plaques for Ron.



RON'S PHOTOS OF THE EVENT IN 1999

Top Left

Stan Curran, Member of the Boston & Beaufighter Association, presenting Ron Wardlaw with the plaque that Stan made for him.



Top Right

A close-up view of Ron's plaque.

Middle

(L-R) Ron Wardlaw, Peter White, Stan Curran and a representative of the War Planes Museum at Caboolture.



Bottom Left

The model of A19 – 137, the plane navigated by Peter White on a number of missions.



PHOTO ABOVE

Ron Wardlaw in front of a Boston plane in King George Square Brisbane 17th August 1985.

PHOTO BELOW

Ron Wardlaw at the Brisbane Anzac Day March 1998...this was the last march that he participated in.



ARTICLE BELOW

This article was written by Peter White and appeared in the "The Whisperer" in December 2000

The

WHISPERER

**The Newsletter of the Beaufighter and
Boston Association of Queensland**

DECEMBER 2000

RON WARDLAW

Ron Wardlaw passed away and a Memorial service was held in Caloundra, on the 12th October 2000. Ron battled for quite a long time with failing eyesight and cancer. It was a long hard battle, but he showed great fortitude and put on a brave face. Ron was the Association's, representative with the Caloundra Air Museum, and looked after our interests there. It was very fitting that a photo of the Association's banner was on the front page of his order of service.

He was responsible for the erection of the Association's Memorial plinth in the front garden of the Museum. and he unveiled it at a very moving ceremony. Those of us who attended the unveiling and dedication of the plinth at the Museum, and there were nearly two hundred from all around the country, will always carry the memory of his eloquent and emotional unveiling of this Memorial which is, now also his. May a gallant comrade rest in peace.

